

**HIROSHIMA: THE SUFFERING AND THE HOPE  
AS A RESOURCE FOR THE CHURCH'S PEACE MINISTRY**

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## ABSTRACT

Hiroshima: The Suffering and the Hope as a Resource for the Church's Peace Ministry, by Nobuko Miyake-Stoner.

Faced with the threat of nuclear war, the church reflects the world in its avoidance and denial of the issue. As a native of Hiroshima, the writer proposes that an interpretation of the experience of Hiroshima in a Christian framework can empower the church population to an increased commitment to work for peace. Drawing on personal experience and interviews with hibakusha (the survivors of the A-bomb) in Hiroshima, as well as printed and audio-visual resources, the writer depicts the human consequences of the first use of an atomic weapon against humanity.

The first atomic bombing needs to be understood from the human perspective. Political and military evaluations do not suffice. The bomb's past and still lingering effects on the bodies and psyches of living human beings must be seen in their universal implications. Hiroshima today is a human drama of both suffering and aspiration for peace. The suffering of the victims can be vicariously experienced. And the writer intends to show how this empathetic identification with both the suffering and the hope of the hibakusha can help cure the "spiritual paralysis" of

the church (it's indifference in the face of the nuclear threat). Denial of the nuclear threat can be counteracted by the journey into the cross and resurrection theme impregnant in the Hiroshima experience, where death and life are dialectically related to each other

The motif of hope found in Ezekiel 36: 16-38 echoes the hope arising in the seemingly hopeless situation of Hiroshima. The promise of restoration to exiled Israel is couched in images which resonate with the experience of Hiroshima: plants and new life blossoming out of a desolate wasteland. Welcoming the pain of Hiroshima as their own can allow people to experience the hope of the hibakusha and to experience a change of "hearts of stone" into "hearts of flesh."

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

On July 16 in 1945, shortly before the end of World War II, the first test of an atomic bomb took place at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The site was uninhabited desert. Only twenty-one days after this single test, on August 6, at 8:15 in the morning, an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. But this was not uninhabited desert; it was a city inhabited by approximately 350,000 men, women, and children.

The bomb, called "Little Boy," weighed 4 tons and contained less than 1 kilogram of Uranium 235 for the nuclear reaction. With this single bomb, in one single moment, the city of Hiroshima was obliterated.

Three days later, at 11:02 a.m. on August 9, another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, a city of 280,000 people. This time the material used for the nuclear reaction was plutonium 237. Less than 1 kilogram of this wiped out half of the city of Nagasaki.

Today, my hometown of Hiroshima is known around the world for its unenviable historic "first." And yet, the essential problem facing the world and the church remains the same as it has been ever since the dropping of the first nuclear explosive on humankind: how to deal with the nuclear threat. As nuclear weapons have become a symbol of national power and pride, more countries strive to acquire them. No one really knows how to stop this frightening proliferation of nuclear arms. Already the world's arsenal is capable of eradicating all humankind several times over, and still it grows.

Hiroshima will be the focus of my attention in this paper, for this is where I have firsthand experience and where my research has centered. Nagasaki's story is equally compelling, but it is beyond the scope of this study. I leave it to others to document the specific experiences of Nagasaki.

From the outset, it should be made clear that there is no intention on my part to point a finger of blame at the United States alone. Many hibakusha (this word was coined by the Japanese to describe those who were exposed to the bomb and survived) have acknowledged Japan's fault in starting the war. But questions of guilt and military justification for the use of the bomb are not my primary concern here. Hiroshima is much more than just an historical and military event about which historians and military



strategists argue. My interest is to show that the particular event of Hiroshima has not only universal implications (which many others have pointed out), but also to suggest how knowledge of the experience of Hiroshima can be a source of hope and healing today.

August 6, 1945, when the heavens cracked and the earth crumbled at Hiroshima, is now a mere moment in history for most of us. We have been content to relegate it to a corner of the past. But Hiroshima of August, 1945 has its dreadful legacy today. The city reduced to ashes by the A-bomb again climbs skyward. The streets and buildings of razed Hiroshima rise in even greater modernity and splendor; but human flesh once slashed by the incinerating madness of the bomb is still with us, still scarred. The once flawless skin of young men and women is now marred by distorted hideousness that can never be erased. Hundreds suffer day and night from leukemia, waiting for death as their bone marrow is eaten away, their bodies gradually ceasing to produce blood altogether. Forty years after that instant of conflagration, the treacherous demon of radiation, released on that day, still threaten those who survive until now, waiting to do with them as it wishes.

Pope John Paul II, on his historic visit to Hiroshima in 1981, said,

To remember the past is to commit oneself to the future.  
To remember Hiroshima is to abhor nuclear war. To  
remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace.<sup>1</sup>

These words reflect the growing awareness that all humanity should recognize its connectedness with Hiroshima. To aid our work for peace in our time, we should ourselves experience, with as much detail and passion as possible, the experiences of those who first endured a nuclear attack. From immersion in the stories of suffering can arise a hope for the future, just as resurrection complements the cross. Death and life, despair and hope are dialectically related to each other. A passionate and deep understanding of this truth can move the church from its spiritual paralysis to become an active agent for peace in the world. This is the central thesis of this project.

It is clear that the world has so far failed to learn much from Hiroshima, perhaps in part because people have failed to remember Hiroshima in its fullest dimensions. Is not Hiroshima remembered mostly for the immense physical destruction demonstrated there? Is not the power of the bomb often emphasized at the expense of what the bomb has done and is still doing to human bodies and psyches?

Hiroshima is more than a powerful symbol of enormous destructive capacity. Hiroshima in reality is a human drama of both suffering and aspiration for peace. Hiroshima is more than a mushroom cloud which suggests the possible annihilation of human life on earth by power-hungry and self-centered groups of people. Beneath the cloud, there were countless normal, everyday lives of people. Theirs is

the story I want to tell, so that we may join in their pain, but even more, so that we may join in their active pursuit of peace.

Any interpretation of Hiroshima will inevitably be fragmentary. No one can tell the whole story. The city's name is frequently recalled for its symbolic value, but often the interpretations seem superficial or distorted to those of us who have had more experience there. I cannot say everything that needs to be said about Hiroshima, but it is my wish to contribute to the richness of its symbolism by emphasizing the real human drama surrounding the event of the bombing and to find in that story the impetus to move the church and society from its apathy and neglect of the nuclear issue.

In order to interpret the bombing experience from the human perspective, we have to ask the following questions: (1) What has the Hiroshima bomb done and what is it continuing to do to human beings? and (2) How have the survivors responded and how should we respond to the death and destruction wrought by the bomb? To help contextualize responses to these questions in a Christian framework, reflections on some Biblical symbols of hope and the images of hope indigenous to Hiroshima will follow.

Already suggested here is the importance of universalizing the hibakusha experience—seeing it as an experience already shared by all humanity. Those who are

hibakusha or related to hibakusha see it as a very important responsibility to raise awareness about this human experience which affects everyone. All of us need to be moved to deal with the problems of nuclear weapons from a global perspective since all of us have become potential victims of their unleashing. And the urgency of the task for hibakusha is seen in the fact that in less than 50 years almost all the original hibakusha will have died. Before they are gone (and before any further nuclear holocaust) we need to hear their stories and learn the lesson of Hiroshima.

The purpose of the paper is to argue that in the face of the current nuclear threat the healing of the church from its spiritual paralysis will not take place until it comes fully to terms with the human tragedy of Hiroshima. As I have shared the information in this paper with churches through workshops, seminars, and sermons, it has been my experience that people can be changed by it. My belief is that sharing the stories of hibakusha in the church will help transform its anxiety and denial of the nuclear threat into hope-filled and faith-filled action, including appropriate political action.

The information in the following pages has been gathered from printed resources, audio-visual resources, personal interviews and my own personal experience as the child of a mother who survived the bomb despite her location

just one mile from the hypocenter. During seven weeks in Hiroshima in the fall of 1983, I was able to interview at length at least 20 hibakusha on videotape. Interviewees were chosen on the basis of availability and willingness to be videotaped. Some had received considerable media attention in the past. But I was also able to meet and interview some of the more obscure and less publicized victims, such as hibakusha of Korean nationality who were in Hiroshima as forced laborers in 1945. Interviews were done in the most casual way possible in order to encourage forthright and genuine responses. Many were done in homes, some were in public buildings and parks.

Aside from the work done by Robert Jay Lifton in the 1960's (which I will cite frequently), little formal study of the plight of the hibakusha has been done. The immensity of the tragedy and the awesomeness of its implications for all of us probably accounts for its neglect by scholars. To deal honestly with the subject requires for most people a significant change of mindset. This paper does not purport to be a comprehensive study of all the dimensions of the human tragedy of Hiroshima, but it is an effort to enable non-hibakusha to experience to a limited degree the experiences of the hibakusha. And ultimately it is intended to show how an understanding of the reality of the suffering can be used to further the cause of peace.

I have chosen to present in Chapter 2 the facts of

the physical damage caused by the bomb. In Chapter 3 I turn to the psychological and social effects on the hibakusha. Chapter 4 addresses the problem of the church's inaction and some reasons for its apparent apathy. The final chapter attempts to intertwine Bible study and theological reflection with the most hopeful symbols which have emerged from Hiroshima, thereby providing the church with a framework from which it can act. The appendix contains two case studies to amplify further the description of the nature of the suffering and to analyze the reasons for contrasting responses to the suffering even among hibakusha.

Although Hiroshima must have a profound impact on theology and the ways of doing theology, it is beyond the scope of this paper to propose new formulations of basic Christian doctrines which may be required in our post-Hiroshima world.<sup>2</sup> It is my more modest intention to suggest how Christians can see God at work even in the aftermath of so great a human-created tragedy as Hiroshima and thereby be challenged and inspired to a greater commitment to peace work.

Learning about the human drama of Hiroshima can be an important step toward active engagement in peacemaking as a personal and political alternative to reliance on nuclear deterrence. I have known of many people spurred to action after being exposed to the story of Hiroshima. For this result to occur, however, it is important that the story be

contextualized properly so as not to induce sheer despair and a sense of powerlessness. My reason for assessing the physical, social, and psychological impact of the bombing on the lives of hibakusha, therefore, is not to evoke pity; it is to see a faithful God at work and to provide the impetus for recovering hope for the future.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Inscribed on a plaque in the lobby of the Peace Memorial Hall in the Hiroshima Peace Park.

<sup>2</sup>This has been attempted recently by at least two writers: Jim Garrison, The Darkness of God: Theology After Hiroshima (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) and Gordon D. Kaufman, Theology for A Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).



## Chapter 2

### PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF THE BOMB

This chapter describes the physical effects on property and people of the first atomic bomb. Knowledge of this data provides the essential background for understanding what follows in the paper. The scope and immensity of the destruction are difficult to comprehend, but increased awareness of the physical effects will enable a more understanding and empathetic response to stories of the hibakusha found in the following chapters.

Much is still unknown about exactly what happened at the moment the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima. Many things are known, however. The blast was of a magnitude to transform pieces of straw into bullets; the heat was intense enough to melt steel, glass and pottery; and deadly, invisible radiation was instantly dispersed over a wide area.

1900 feet above the ground, the bomb became a ball of fire, instantaneously producing a temperature of fifty million degrees fahrenheit. Ground temperatures at the hypocenter were several thousand degrees fahrenheit. All roof tiles within a radius of one kilometer were blistered.

The explosion created an area of total destruction

extending two miles in all directions in a flat city of homes and buildings made largely of wood. Within three miles of the epicenter 62,000 out of 90,000 buildings were destroyed. All utilities and transport services were demolished, and twenty-six out of thirty-three fire stations were destroyed, leaving only sixteen pieces of fire-fighting equipment to deal with a whole city on fire. Forty-two of the city's forty-five hospitals were devastated, killing 270 of the 298 doctors and 1,645 of the 1,780 nurses.<sup>1</sup>

Death rates show that over ninety percent of those within .5 kilometers and over eighty percent of those in the .5-to-1 kilometer zone were killed instantly or died soon after the bombing. Even within 1 to 1.5 kilometers, the death rate exceeded fifty percent.

Many near ground zero were instantly vaporized. Thermal burns extended out almost four kilometers (2.5 miles). Victims who were unprotected by buildings and who were wearing dark clothes apparently absorbed more intense heat and suffered more severe burns. Severity was naturally also dependent on distance from the epicenter.

Similarly, the deaths from blast effects were most numerous near the hypocenter. Thousands were crushed by falling buildings and pierced by flying glass even if they were shielded from the heat. Among traumas, in fact, one of the most difficult was the removal of countless glass pieces embedded in the skin and muscles. Even now, many years later, glass pieces still sometimes work their way out of hibakusha's bodies.

Radiation was not the instant killer that heat and blast were, but it caused numerous deaths in the days and

weeks following the bombing. This factor alone makes the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki unique in the history of warfare.

Regarding the actual number of deaths in Hiroshima, estimates vary widely. The difficulty of establishing even a persuasive approximation of the number of deaths itself indicates the enormity of the destruction. Estimates range from "63,000 to 240,000. The official American estimate is 78,000, although the city of Hiroshima estimates 200,000."

Here are some of the problems in making an accurate count. Within 500 meters of the hypocenter, destruction was so complete that few bodies were recovered (many disappeared in vapor, leaving only a shadow). Further from the hypocenter, bodies of victims trapped inside buildings were totally consumed by the fires which followed the detonation. Many seeking refuge from the fire in the turbulent rivers of Hiroshima were swept away to the sea. And the hurried, large-scale, open-air cremations of the dead in the days following the holocaust precluded the identification of bodies. Even if there had been time, many were too disfigured to identify even the sex, let alone the name.

The district of Nakajima exemplifies the destruction and the impossibility of counting the dead. Located near the hypocenter, Nakajima was entirely wiped out on August 6, 1945. It was not rebuilt after the war. Where hundreds of houses once stood, the Peace Park is now located. The

buildings were all leveled and burned by the bomb and the people were incinerated. No parents were left to report the deaths of their children, no children to account for their deceased parents.

Furthermore, there were no accurate records of the population of Hiroshima in 1945, for its population was very fluid at that time. The ongoing evacuation of the population and the frequent in and out movement of previously evacuated people were part of the situation. There were a large number of military facilities with their mobile personnel; and workers from outside the city were mobilized to work on military-related projects in Hiroshima. All data on these manpower resources were treated as a military secret. For all these reasons, we will never know the true number of victims of the A-bomb.

So the diverse estimated numbers are all we have, and the best of them are based only on analysis of the remaining partial materials and records. Generally the number of deaths is regarded as underestimated because it is based on the unreliable number reported immediately after the bombing. But whatever the true count, the casualties were so great that "citizens who lost no family members in the holocaust were as rare as stars at sunrise."<sup>3</sup>

The physical effects of the bomb on hibakusha were both immediate and long-term. Apart from their injuries, the A-bomb casualties experienced acute illnesses

within the first two months after the bombing; then the third through sixth months were a time of healing and recovery, though some patients died during this time from various multiple severe conditions. This initial improvement, however, was deceptive, because secondary effects lay deep in the hibakusha's bodies all the while they seemed to be getting better. In the period after recovery from primary effects, the radiation-induced aftereffects began to appear. The initial aftereffect was a fibrous growth over burn scar tissue. These abnormal growths over scars are called keloids, one of the most visible legacies of the bomb. At this stage, even when skin grafts were made, the keloids tended to grow back again.↵

Had sufficient medical care been available soon after the bombing, such scars could possibly have been alleviated (although truly effective therapy for radiation burns is still unknown). But the whole possibility of treatment itself vanished completely in the bombing. Wartime Japan made little provision for caring for civilian casualties; and especially after destruction on this scale, help was slow to come from any quarter.

The keloids, a unique by-product of the bombing, remain with many survivors today. They are ugly, sometimes grotesque, reminders of the instant of tragedy many years ago. For many, they seem to symbolize the inner scars which

have never healed.

Some of the hibakusha have undergone extensive plastic surgery. Michiko Yamaoka, whose experiences will be told later, has had plastic surgery for the removal of keloids 39 times in the past 39 years.

Those who escaped both the blast and thermal burns had yet to suffer from the unpredictable influence of radiation. At the time of exposure to atomic radiation, there was no feeling of heat and no sensation of pain. But unfailingly the radiation penetrated deep into the bodies of the hibakusha. People who had been congratulated on having escaped injury suddenly fell into a critical condition. Those who showed no symptoms until three weeks after exposure began to die. Loss of appetite, loss of hair, and general malaise were the first symptoms as the victims' state of health began to deteriorate. As their hair fell out, their skin developed purple spots, their gums began to bleed, and they spat out blood from the hemorrhaging of inner organs.

The tissues producing blood cells are very sensitive to radiation.<sup>5</sup> Within two weeks of exposure, the number of white blood cells, which are the body's major source of defense against disease, dropped drastically. They did gradually build back up to a normal level over the next three to four weeks. During this time, the hibakusha were extremely susceptible to a wide range of ailments.

From the third to the fifth week after the detonation, many hibakusha died of such ordinary diseases as diarrhea. To make matters worse, the blood platelets, which are required for clotting, were also destroyed. Without the platelets, even a minor hemorrhage became dangerous and caused the victim to become anemic.

Radiation thus destroyed the body's function by disturbing and damaging the cells and substances that make up the body. Simultaneously, it also destroyed the natural resistance components and undermined the power of recovery. Therefore the injuries caused by radiation are more deadly than other kinds of injuries. The radiation absorbed in that instant is binding for the rest of the hibakusha's life.

The major determining factors of how much radiation each hibakusha was exposed to were these: distance from the hypocenter, whether indoors or outdoors, and what she or he was wearing at the time of the bombing. A number of questions remain unanswered. What was the maximum dose of radiation a person could absorb and still survive? Does a given amount of radiation produce the same symptoms in everyone, or do symptoms vary according to sex, age, body size, etc.? Most importantly, is there any possible treatment for the victims of exposure to massive amounts of radiation?

Three months after the bomb, a variety of cancers

began to appear. The occurrence of cancer and death from cancer was observably higher among hibakusha than among the general population. The lungs, stomach, breasts, pancreas, liver, and thyroid gland have been the most frequent sites of malignant tumors. Among the different forms of cancer, leukemia, a cancer of the blood in which white cells are overproduced, is the cause of more deaths than any of the other cancers. Though some scientists say it is not conclusively proven, the causative relationship between radiation and leukemia is strongly implied.

Another discovery has been that rapidly growing young tissues and those most dependent on a generous blood supply seemed to be the most radio-sensitive. These include the epithelium tissues of the lungs, intestines, and other organs; the reproductive organs (eg. ovaries and testicles); and the blood-producing tissues such as the bone marrow and the lymphatic nodes. Examined regularly until reaching maturity, victims who had been less than six years old at the time of the bomb and received more than one hundred rads of radiation grew to an average height of about four centimeters (1 2/3 inches) less than the average height of unexposed or less-exposed children. Children between the ages of six and eleven at the time of the bomb grew to be about two and one-half centimeters shorter than normal. No noticeable difference was seen among young adults who had been twelve years old or older at the time of the bomb.\*



To damage young tissues means to damage young lives. According to a report released by the Chugoku newspaper in Hiroshima, those who were under ten years of age at the time of the bombing have three to six times more incidence of cancer than the older generations.<sup>7</sup> This young generation of hibakusha, which make up 28% of the entire hibakusha population, are now taking major roles in families and society. Surveys show that 57% of them have recognizable anxiety over the aftereffects of the bomb.

Radiation has poisoned not only these older survivors, but also even those in utero at the time of the bomb. Thirty-four percent of all children born to women who had received at least 180 rads of radiation during pregnancy were immature, ie. their birth weight was under 2500 grams (5lbs. 8 oz.), compared with about ten percent of immature births to women who had received less radiation.<sup>8</sup>

James W. Wood and others observed that fetal victims who had been within 1500 meters of the hypocenter were generally shorter, lighter, and had smaller heads at maturity than fetal victims who had been outside the 1500-meter radius. The departure from normal head radius ranged from 4 to 14 millimeters (.16 to .55 in.), the weight difference was from one to three kilograms (2.2 to 6.6 lbs.), and the height difference was one to two centimeters (.4 to .8 in.).

It was assumed that the observed differences in

growth were attributable to the varying degrees of irradiation experienced. This assumption was significantly reinforced by the observation of retarded growth among children of the Marshall Islands who were exposed to radioactive fallout after the American H-bomb test on Bikini Island in 1954.<sup>9</sup>

A direct relationship between mental retardation and radiation dose as indicated by distance from the hypocenter was also established by Wood and others. "Within 1500 meters from the hypocenter, the prevalence of mental retardation is five times as high as for the more distant subjects. and 6 to 15 weeks gestation was the most sensitive period."<sup>10</sup>

Victims seriously affected by microencephaly (small head) cannot be responsible for themselves in basic daily functions such as meals, toilet, bathing, moving about, and so on. They can only live with the assistance of adults, usually their parents. Forty years after the bombing, their parents are growing old and dying. Who will take care of these children in adult bodies?

Extensive research on children born years later to exposed parents has shown no apparent genetic abnormalities transmitted by the parents to them. The degree of genetic damage in general has been far less than anticipated.<sup>11</sup> But this does not mean that atomic radiation is genetically harmless; for in cases where large amounts of radiation were

absorbed, the natural defense against passing on injurious effects to following generations has likely taken the form of stillbirth or miscarriage. Thus it is necessary to be cautious regarding premature optimism about the genetic fate of the children and grandchildren of hibakusha. The fact that no genetic abnormalities have yet been found does not mean that the present generations or future generations are entirely free from all possible abnormalities. Geneticists have long known that "once a mutation has been established, it becomes permanent, and genetic damage is cumulative and irreversible."<sup>12</sup> Mutations are passed through generations until eliminated by natural selection. No prediction can be made unequivocally. Only by studying the progeny of hibakusha over many generations can we accumulate enough data to draw final conclusions.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jim Garrison, The Plutonium Culture: From Harrisburg to Hiroshima (New York: Continuum, 1981) 65.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 6.

<sup>4</sup>Seiichi Nakano, Hiroshima: Genbaku Saigai no Tsumeato (Hiroshima: Wounds of Atomic Bomb Casualties) (Kyoto: Sorinsha, 1982) 138ff.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Alexander, Atomic Radiation and Life (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965) 138.

<sup>6</sup>Jack Schubert and Ralph E. Lapp, Radiation: What It Is and How It Affects You (New York: Viking Press, 1957) 33ff.

<sup>7</sup>August 8, 1983 edition.

<sup>8</sup>Hiroo Kato, "Mortality in Children Exposed to the A-Bomb While In Utero, 1945-1969" American Journal of Epidemiology, No. 93 (June 1971) 534.

<sup>9</sup>James W. Wood, et al., "The Growth and Development of Children Exposed In Utero to the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki" American Journal of Public Health, No. 57 (August 1967) 1376.

<sup>10</sup>James W. Wood, et al., "Mental Retardation of Children Exposed In Utero to the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki" American Journal of Public Health, No. 57 (August 1967) 1389.

<sup>11</sup>James V. Neel, "Atomic Bombs, Inbreeding, and Japanese Genes" Michigan Quarterly Review, No. 6 (July 1967) 206.

<sup>12</sup>Alexander, 169.

## Chapter 3

### PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE BOMB

#### Introduction

Since little formal research has been done on the psychological aftereffects of the bomb, this chapter will rely considerably on episodic accounts and personal testimonies of hibakusha. Diverse and still largely uncatalogued social and psychological effects are presented here to give the reader some sense of the ongoing struggles of the hibakusha.

About 370,000 hibakusha live today in Japan, and several thousand in other countries.<sup>1</sup> They have been living for over forty years bearing the agony caused by a single atomic bomb. Though it would be imprecise to make sweeping generalizations about their psychological make-ups, several identifiable characteristics can be noted as growing out of their common experience. In the following pages we will see how these elements of their continuing anguish grow out of (a) the direct experience and its memory, (b) the vicious cycle of A-bomb diseases, poverty, and related distresses, and (c) the alienation from political, economic, and social life.

### The Direct Experience and Its Memory

The intense anguish began on August 6, 1945, when the hibakusha were suddenly immersed in a tremendous sea of death, surrounded by the numerous corpses of people, including family, friends, relatives, and colleagues. "We saw hell," the hibakusha often say. Many thought the end of the world had come.

Robert J. Lifton's classic study of the hibakusha, Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima, has much to say about this experience. The "death in life" occurred when the line between death and life could not be clearly drawn. The uncanny grotesqueness of the scene, the image of neither-dead-nor-alive human figures with whom the survivor closely identifies himself/herself, is typical.<sup>2</sup> A grocer, himself severely burned, described his experience thus:

The experience of these people was...well, they all had skin blackened by burns... They had no hair because their hair was burned, and at a glance you couldn't tell whether you were looking at them from in front or in back... They hold their arms bent (forward) like this (he proceeds to demonstrate their position)...and their skin, not only on their hands, but on their faces and bodies too, hung down... If there had only been one or two such people... perhaps I would not have had such a strong impression. But wherever I walked I met these people... Many of them died along the road... I can still picture them in my mind like walking ghosts... They didn't look like people of this world... They had a special way of walking... very slowly... I myself was one of them.<sup>3</sup>

Lifton further points out that the death imprint of Hiroshima survivors is made unique in three aspects: the suddenness and totality of their death saturation, the

permanent taint of death associated with radiation aftereffects, and their continuing group relationship to world fears of nuclear extermination. The grotesqueness surrounding the death imprint conveyed the psychological sense that death was not only everywhere, but was bizarre, unnatural, indecent, absurd.<sup>4</sup>

Many hibakusha experienced a heightened awareness of their own vulnerability, while the notion of having been victimized by the supernatural occurred to others. The bombing experiences vary from victim to victim. There are no identical stories. But without any exception, every survivor has led a life of grief and mourning since his/her death immersion.

He mourns first of all for family members and for others who had been close to him. And he mourns, as we have repeatedly seen, for the anonymous dead. But he mourns also for inanimate objects and lost symbols—for possessions, houses, streets he had known, beliefs that have been shattered, a way of life that has been 'killed.' In sum, he mourns for his own former self, for what he was prior to the intrusion upon it of death and death conflicts. For what has been taken from him (and the word 'bereavement' suggests being robbed of something) is his innocence of death, and particularly of grotesquely demeaning death.<sup>5</sup>

All survivors are burdened by some degree of death anxiety, due not to the fear of dying itself, but of premature, inappropriate death and unfulfilled life.

"Inappropriate death on a massive scale causes a fundamental disruption of the survivor's sense of the general continuity of human existence."<sup>6</sup> Before August 6, 1945, each person lived with his or her own death in mind; but since

Hiroshima, the hibakusha and everyone else have been forced to live with the idea of the extinction of the entire species. In other words, the death of humanity was what the hibakusha saw over the deathly quiet radioactive wasteland after the bombing.

The extreme experience demonstrates that guilt is immediately stimulated by participation in the breakdown of the general human order and by separation from it... Death, especially when inappropriate and premature, is the essence of breakdown and separation. In identifying so strongly with the dead--informing what we have called the identity of the dead--the survivor seeks both to atone for his participation in that breakdown, and to reconstitute a form of order around that atonement.<sup>7</sup>

In the situation of total collapse, survival seemed abnormal and unnatural. With death so overwhelmingly pervasive around them, it seems only natural for the survivors to think they should have died too. Nevertheless, they survived. To be alive now is for them a deviation from an order in which death and desolation are the norms. In fact, even today, most suspect that their survival was made possible by the death of others. This inclination, reinforced by the traditional Japanese imperative of society over the individual, enhances their guilt and shame.

There are indeed a number of hibakusha who survived because they left others to die. Following is one example. The narrator was with his son, a third-year middle school student, one-half mile from the hypocenter. He revealed his story with an expression of great revulsion.

We were at home when the ball of fire burst. There was



a sudden flash and a mighty roar followed it. We ran outside. In an instant, the house collapsed with my son trapped between the beams. Soon after, he lost consciousness. I tried to get them off him, using a log as a lever to raise the timbers trapping my son's leg. After a while, he came back to consciousness; so I urged him to be brave all the while. The flames were drawing in on us, and the wreckage of our own house had already caught fire. I told my son to pull his leg out, but his ankle was held fast by the wood. By then the fire was closing in on three sides. I then could not help but beg him: 'It's no use. Don't think ill of me—I'm getting out. You won't think ill of me, son?' And flinging the log away, I fled, leaving my son's high, shouting voice: 'Dad, help me!'

The man's son also shared his story:

Despite my cry for help, he abandoned me. He looked back a few times and ran away. In despair I sank down among the timbers—whereupon, quite suddenly, I no longer felt the restraint on my ankle, and found myself free to crawl out from between the timbers. My leg slid out from the timbers just like one of those Chinese puzzles that seem impossible to undo until one chances on the solution. So I ran along a road that led toward a gap in the fires, then all the way to an aunt's house in Mitaki-cho, where I found him. Soon after I saw him, I fled the scene and started walking toward my dead mother's home in the country.

A reunion like this of father and son produced mixed, but powerful emotions. The man in the story is now the father of two daughters by a second marriage, but he has never reconciled with his son. The bomb not only destroyed the basic, irreplaceable relationship of father and son, but it also locked them into a life of guilt and anger toward each other. How could their relationship be restored? Where could the son find healing for the deep scars in his heart? How could the father find a way to relieve his immense sense of guilt and shame?

Following is another example of the abnormal,

antisocial behavior at that time, behavior which haunts the survivors until today:

On the evening of August 6, the city was still on fire. Those who were injured but still had some strength to walk gathered together, one by one. They were the lucky ones compared to the severely injured who were moaning and faintly crying for help everywhere in the smoldering city. The survivors started scavenging for food. They gathered like a pack of hyenas around a group of dying boys and girls who had been brought to the city that morning as a labor force to demolish houses for building a wider street. The survivors robbed the children of the lunch boxes their mothers had sent with them. Some of the lunch boxes were forced from the arms of the children, some of whom were still calling, 'Mother, Mother,' in their last breath.

Decades later, those children's voices are still in their ears. The memory never fades from their minds.<sup>10</sup>

Particularly noticeable among parents who lost their children is the sense of inappropriate survivorship. They live, but their children died. Guilt and shame combine, because it is a shame not to have children. The only joy and fulfillment of many adults in Japan is assumed to come from rearing children and looking forward to their maturity. When the children grow up, they are obliged to take care of their parents until the end of their lives. Thus the bomb left child-deprived parents with guilt at the same time as it deprived them of the joy of their children and the hope for a secure old age.

Furthermore, many hibakusha are also troubled by their failure to perform their obligation to the dead for proper rituals and burials. The situation in the days and months after the bombing makes it obvious why that was

impossible. Such feelings of remorse may be universal among bereaved people, but they seem to be more prominent among Japanese because of the important values of filial piety and ancestor worship.

The hibakusha's sense of guilt and shame emerged later as self-condemnation and self-hatred. They condemned themselves for having survived, for having been glad to have survived, for not having helped others to survive, and for neglecting the proper rituals for the dead.

Lifton explains how the hibakusha dealt with their difficult and complex feelings:

The survivor's major defense against death anxiety and death guilt is the cessation of feeling. The survivor was able to limit his encounter with (biological or symbolic) death by limiting his psychological investment in that encounter. We may thus say that the survivor initially undergoes a radical but temporary diminution in his sense of actuality in order to avoid losing his sense completely and permanently; he undergoes a reversible form of symbolic death in order to avoid a permanent physical or psychic death.<sup>11</sup>

If the cessation of feeling becomes chronic, Lifton describes such a state as "psychic numbing."<sup>12</sup> Moderate psychic numbing gradually incapacitates hibakusha in relating to death, either of others or of themselves, making them oblivious to death; while extreme psychic numbing leads to a state of "death in life" in which hibakusha no longer feel related to the activities and moral standards of the life process. For instance, many hibakusha vehemently reject material assistance even though they are in desperate need. It is because they want to avoid intolerable feelings of

weakness and inferiority; but furthermore it is due to their general loss of trust in everything and their diffuse anger toward themselves and others for having been rendered so helpless.

Another way for hibakusha to relate to death anxiety and guilt is through survivor paranoia. They focus on "enemies" around themselves so that they can reinforce the feeling that they are still being victimized. This angry reaction provoked by their victim consciousness is, in a way, a desperate effort to express their vitality. Otherwise, they would be totally overwhelmed by death anxiety or incapacitated by psychic numbing.

The magnitude of atomic destruction, exceeding all human imagination, caused hibakusha such extreme psychological shock and such total confusion that they could not comprehend the nature of their loss. Chiyoko Kimura, who was 68 years old when I interviewed her in Hiroshima in the fall of 1983, was 3 kilometers from the hypocenter when the bomb exploded. She reflects on her experience after the bombing:

Day after day, I saw a ship loading numbers of corpses and going to Ninoshima (island) where they were cremated. I often saw arms and legs of the corpses hanging from the deck. But I never felt strange, taking everything for granted; for I was then surrounded by death. Death was such a common event that I got used to it, or I felt that way only to survive psychologically. In retrospect, I think I was in a sense insane then. War made my consciousness so numb that I didn't even question about what caused such enormous death. 'If you don't kill your enemies, you are killed.' This kind of mentality war creates in us. War is madness.<sup>13</sup>

The severity of shock, along with other disabling conditions, indeed caused the victims to become quite literally insane. They were robbed of all psychological equilibrium.

Yoshitoshi Kubo explained the psychological condition of the victims in his "Study of Human Behavior Immediately After the Bombing of Hiroshima" based on his research from 1949 to 1952.<sup>14</sup> Kubo studied the cases of fifty-four A-bomb victims, most of whom were within one to three kilometers of the hypocenter at the time of the bombing. Since eighty percent of Hiroshima's population is estimated to have been within the two-kilometer radius, the experiences of his target group may be considered as good representations of many victims. In fact, Kubo's report is regarded today as one of the most reliable sources of information about specific experiences of hibakusha.

In his study scheme, the explosion of the bomb was the external stimulus to which the victims responded. The bomb's flash, blast, and the initial collapse of buildings are called the first set of stimuli. Some people fell down, covering their eyes and heads with their hands; others turned their bodies away from the flash; and others turned toward the illuminated area. Kubo termed this "instinctive behavior."<sup>15</sup>

Immediately after the flash, the blast swiftly followed. People were blown down and buildings and

surrounding objects were completely demolished. Instantly the victims were so stunned that their minds became blank. Some lost consciousness and even on awakening, the blankness remained, the same mental emptiness. Gradually they came to be aware (though still psychologically unbalanced), "Hey, I am alive." But due to their injuries, they at once concluded, "It must have been a direct hit (of a conventional bomb) on me."<sup>16</sup> With fear for their lives and the urge of self-preservation, they tried to get away from the bombed area.

At this point, the victims began to see themselves and the surrounding situation more objectively, including those who were burned and the utter devastation on all sides, with flames leaping everywhere. Kubo called these phenomena the second set of stimuli.

Being in the midst of the blazing city, they could not help but feel that something incomprehensible had happened. Their initial judgment of a "direct hit" was changed to a consciousness of utter chaos beyond imagination, and they instinctively tried to escape from the danger to their lives. Unable to make clear judgments in selecting objectives for action, however, or to determine how to attain their objectives, they engaged in the blind action of a "crisis mentality"—a state of mind which led to all kinds of mistakes which resulted in panic. The more awareness they gained of their surroundings, the more

fearful and panicky they became. Blown about by raging, hot winds, they sensed the rapidly spreading fires. The roar of the reconnaissance planes, the repeated explosions caused by the fires, and the mystifying thunder from the mushroom cloud—all these were followed by the "black rain."

Successive waves of maimed and disfigured victims were leaving the city. Some were shouting, "That way is dangerous," or "Another air raid is coming," but most were simply following along aimlessly like living ghosts. It is easy to suspect that not a few in the fleeing crowd had lost the ability to cope with such an utterly overwhelming array of stimuli and had become insane. These phenomena constituted the third set of stimuli. Hibakusha often describe these experiences in words like these: "It was like hell" or "All those wounds and burns—it was beyond words."

The magnitude of the various external stimuli was so enormous that tremendous confusion and chaos were imposed on the victims' ability for discernment and judgment. Furthermore, in countless cases, the physical organs that coordinate human subjectivity were lost or impaired by multiple burns and injuries. As a result, from the common psychological scheme of "stimulus to subject to response," the middle function was blocked out by a dehumanizing impact. The victims were temporarily deprived of normal psychological functions such as rationality and love and were reduced to the lowest level of ego-centric behavior,

reacting directly to the stimuli.

### Vicious Cycle of Disease, Poverty, and Related Distresses

Soon after the bombing, gradual recovery of psychological functions began, especially among those who could receive treatment for their burns or wounds (by rescue teams from outside Hiroshima). What appeared to be recovery, however, turned out to be the beginning of a life-long sense of vulnerability to a likely bizarre death. Leukemia and other radiation diseases were always lurking in the shadows.

Those who were recuperating suffered extreme anxiety and fear that death was near as they saw and heard of their friends and relatives in apparent good health dying mysteriously of "invisible contamination" weeks or months or even years after the bombing. Here is the account of one victim:

My grandmother was taking care of my younger brother on the 14th of August when I left; and when I returned on the 15th of September, she had many spots all over her body. Two or three days later she died... My younger brother, who was just a five-month-old boy, was without breast milk, so we fed him thin rice gruel... But on the 10th of October he suddenly began to look very ill, though I had not then noticed any spots on his body... Then on the next day he began to look a little better, and I thought he was going to survive. I was very pleased, as he was the only family member I had left, and I took him to a doctor. And at that time we found that there were two large spots on his bottom... I heard it said that all these people would die within three years... so I thought sooner or later I too will die... I never knew when some sign of the disease would show itself... This loneliness and the fear... the



physical fear...has been with me always... It is not something temporary... I still have it now.<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, the recovery of normal psychological functions by the hibakusha only helped them discern and assess what was happening around them; the deaths of family and friends, the loss of home, wealth and workplace, and even the total collapse of group and community functions. Their increasing realization of these realities created immense mental stress.

Hiroshi Morishita, presently a high school teacher, was a student when the bomb fell. He reflects on his experience as follows:

Sometime after the bombing, I went back home to try to find if anything was left. Standing where we used to live, I was shocked. It was not a feeling of sorrow, rather only strong shock. My house was no longer there. Everything was turned into rubbish. The setting in which I had lived my life had suddenly disappeared. I had heard my mother was killed...that she died in the burning house. But I couldn't find any remnant of her body, not even her bones. Everything became ashes. When this realization came to my mind, I felt like crying out.<sup>18</sup>

Like Morishita, many hibakusha were forced to accept, without understanding of the situation or any idea of how to cope with it, the loss of the most essential elements in life such as the most intimate relatives and friends and the basic means by which they lived. In the midst of this total collapse of meaning, their reaction was mental chaos. What Kubo calls "blankness" or "emptiness," Lifton calls "vacuum state." Here is a victim's testimony which introduces the term:

In those days, we were in a vacuum state...we lost hope entirely. In pre-war times we thought in terms of getting ahead in the world... Then suddenly we lost these hopes... And I lost all other kinds of hope as well...<sup>19</sup>

To this day, many hibakusha are living with an almost inconsolable hopelessness. Their psychological pain has not diminished markedly these many years after the bombing. The shock and trauma continue to produce emotional suffering. The complexity of their traumatic experience makes it most difficult to measure that experience in quantitative, qualitative, and chronological terms. For example, the shocking sights and horrors of the bombing never fade in the hibakushas' mind. They simply cannot forget the overwhelming dying world surrounding them. Also the precariousness of their continuing existence remains so threatening that the ghost of death and desolation returns again and again to haunt them. Thus, even today, hundreds of diaries, testimonies and drawings come from the hands of hibakusha.

In 1974, NHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, requested hibakusha to draw pictures of their memories of the bombing experience. Most had been frustrated when viewing photographic records of the event. They usually said, "No, it was not at all like this." So in 1974 and 1975, a total of 2,3000 drawings and paintings were collected. Viewing the drawings, they again said, "No! It was not like this. this is only one ten-thousandth of what

it actually was." Their artless, yet forthright, drawings caused many non-hibakusha quite literally to faint. Despite the passage of time, the memories of these survivors are strikingly vivid and concrete. The startling lucidity of their memories is surely one proof of the enormity of the psychological trauma they endure.

As the hibakusha started to rebuild their lives, their existence remained indeed precarious. Besides the continuing threat to their own health from delayed radiation effects, there were these other factors which contributed to emotional instability and economic uncertainty: (1) guilt and shame for having survived when so many around them died, (2) fear for their children that they would be unhealthy or deformed, (3) decreased ability to work or care for themselves, and (4) discrimination which enhanced the sense of political, economic, and social alienation. Their efforts to rebuild their fragile lives were so difficult that not a few of them failed over and over again.<sup>20</sup>

In October, 1952, Seiichi Nakano conducted a sociopsychological survey of the households of 332 A-bomb victims and those of 268 non-victims in Kure City, a neighboring city of Hiroshima. He found that among surviving victims who had been within one kilometer of the hypocenter at the time of the bombing, the predominant tendency was for children to abandon parents and for husbands to abandon wives.<sup>21</sup> While mothers' attachment

to children seems to have remained relatively intact, these other disruptions of family relationships were in clear contrast to the behavior of non-victims.

Here is one example which typifies the precarious, fragile existence of the hibakusha. Tomie Yoshimoto is a microcephalic victim, which means she was one of those born with a small head because of exposure to radiation in utero. She writes about herself in her diary:

I was born in Hiroshima in the cold winter of 1946. Because of the A-bomb and Japanese defeat, we had nothing. Misfortune was always with me from birth, for I was born with a deformed right foot... It hurt so much during the rainy season. I don't know how often I thought to cut off that old foot.<sup>22</sup>

Though her father was working for a bakery, he had to be hospitalized when Tomie was a third grader. Since her father's hospitalization was prolonged, her mother, younger sister, and Tomie were taken to her uncle's house. After awhile they were forced to leave, however. With no place to go, they built a shack for themselves along a river in the Motomachi district. They lived there without electricity or running water. Tomie reflects on the difficulty of her childhood days:

Mother worked from early in the morning until late at night. I took my younger sister to a nursery school on my way to my school. At school I was teased and made fun of because of my bad foot... When I was in fifth grade, my father came home from the hospital. At last I thought the four of us could enjoy living together.<sup>23</sup>

Contrary to her hope, however, sorrow visited her family again:

My younger sister came back home sooner than expected, complaining about her bad headache. She went to bed and never woke up again. If we had taken her to a doctor, she might have been saved. But we didn't have the money, so her young life was ended.<sup>24</sup>

Tomie's misfortune continued:

Father changed completely. He became like a different man. He often became drunk and got violent. When it was only half a year before completion of my middle school, Mother and Father had a heated argument. Mother left home and never came back since then. As if that were not enough, soon after I graduated, our house burned down. We lost everything. I had no choice but to go to work.<sup>25</sup>

Eventually Tomie went to Osaka to work:

In Osaka I didn't have any hope or dream. Every day was filled with despair until I met Mr. Yoshimoto. He encouraged me, and I gradually began to feel a new desire to try to live my life again.<sup>26</sup>

Later Tomie got married to Mr. Yoshimoto and her life seemed finally to turn to happiness; but she was not always able to manage the routine housework well. She continues:

One misfortune after another befell me, but above all, the greatest shock came when I had a miscarriage. The bond of our love was broken apart... After my second miscarriage, my husband thought I was barren and he avoided me. To make the situation worse, I became sick and had to go to the hospital frequently. Of course, my husband was not happy. He became quite irritated and angry. eventually our marital relationship completely soured. How often it came to the brink of divorce!<sup>27</sup>

But Tomie had this to say of herself:

I'm stupid, but I want to be loved. That's all. So I just listen to my husband's harsh words or cutting remarks. This is the only thing which salvages a little bit of happiness for us.<sup>28</sup>

In this diary of a fetal victim of the bomb, the precarious existence of hibakusha is portrayed in a

concentrated form: born with a deformed body, reared in poverty and a disrupted family situation, married with the expectation of happiness at last, but threatened always by an inadequate ability to manage daily life, by miscarriages, by sickness, and by a husband lacking in sympathy for her plight. While it is a fact that Tomie's degree of physical affliction is not so severe as many other microcephalic victims, nevertheless she had to taste the bitter fruits of loneliness and despair. But despite her problems, she reacted with sensitivity and strength to the misfortunes and discrimination.

Something more should be added regarding the prevalent fear of declining health among the hibakusha. Those who still survive have seen the frequency of radiation-related illnesses and death among other survivors. As mentioned before, this is a constant source of anxiety.

Besides those who died of acute symptoms in the hours and days immediately after the bombing, many thousands have died in the years since then. Deaths occurred steadily into 1946 and somewhat less frequently thereafter. By 1950 the number of post-bombing deaths had risen to several tens of thousands. Even today, hibakusha are still dying from leukemia and other malignancies. My own grandfather died quite suddenly of liver cancer in 1980.

Every August 6, the names of the deceased from radiation-related illness during the past year are recorded

in the "Past Book" (kako-cho), which is stored under the cenotaph in the Peace Park in Hiroshima. This past year, additional names were recorded there.

Since the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the first human beings to be exposed to so much radiation on so large a scale, no data regarding effects and possible treatment was available in 1945. Still today there is no medically reliable remedy for radiation-related illnesses. Consequently, the unknown factors of A-bomb illness and the great complexity of its symptoms have made it all the more difficult for hibakusha to cope with their physical problems.

While hibakusha can accept to some extent the possibility that A-bomb illness might occur as a condition of their lives, their future prospects cannot help but be influenced by concern about their present precarious physical condition. This uncertainty heightens their mental distress and threatens to turn their hopes and aspirations into despair and insecurity.

Concern about possible genetic effects has extended the anxiety from hibakusha to second and third generation hibakusha. To this point, the best documented cases of genetic damage have been the fetal victims, those such as Tomie Yoshimoto who were in utero at the time of the bombing. Microcephaly (small head) was the most common symptom. Many times this meant mental retardation. Other

deformities, such as Tomie's right foot, also occurred. Children, apparently normal, conceived after the bombing, still have cause for concern about possible hidden genetic effects which may manifest in their children or grandchildren.

### Alienation

Official government attitude toward the bomb was an early and significant factor in the hibakusha's sense of alienation. The day after the bombing, the Japanese government learned from a shortwave broadcast from the United States that an atomic bomb had been used; however, this news was kept from the Japanese people. The military leaders played down the full story of the A-bomb damages and continued using propaganda to try to prevent loss of will to continue the war. Immediately the hibakusha were told to accept their personal damage as a necessary sacrifice for the success of Japan's vision of hegemony in East Asia, thus interpreting their suffering in the context of the war effort. After Japan's surrender, which came nine days after the Hiroshima bomb, the hibakusha were advised to accept the damages as "necessary sacrifices for the sake of peace," a totally different and confusing point of view for the hibakusha. They were thereby obstructed in their effort to understand and cope with the full range of damage they had suffered and were still suffering.



"Necessary sacrifices for the sake of peace"—this justification of the bombing was one of the products of the occupation by Allied (mainly U.S.) forces following Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, which included unconditional surrender by Japan. Japan's war effort was interpreted as a great folly, the end of the war a great good; the public was released from allegiance to the state, and defeat became the gateway to peace. The attitude that the Allied forces had "liberated" the Japanese people gradually spread. Accordingly, the idea that the A-bomb damages were a sacrifice that Japan simply had to accept began to gain support among the Japanese people.

On the first anniversary of the bombing, the Hiroshima Citizens' Rally for the Restoration of Peace passed a resolution asserting, "We should be the cornerstone to build a peaceful Japan."<sup>29</sup> The resolution implied that the afflictions of the A-bomb victims were punishment for their part in a sinful war. The hibakusha were lumped together with all other war victims; and no matter how painful, their sufferings were viewed as simply their own responsibility. This view led hibakusha to penetrating self-examinations and/or to a meek submission to their predicament. Responsibility for ascertaining the truth about the A-bomb damage, therefore, fell into limbo.

Other actions by the occupation forces included the issuance of a press code on September 19, 1945. As a

result, all reports, commentaries, and treatises dealing with A-bomb damage, including even those about medical treatment of A-bomb-related symptoms, were prohibited. Almost all accounts of A-bomb damages disappeared from newspapers, magazines, academic journals and radio broadcasts.<sup>20</sup> Thus the real truth of the disaster and its aftermath was concealed from the public as well as from the victims.

Despite the severe censorship, however, there were some writers who portrayed the horror that they themselves had experienced. Among them are Tamiki Hara and Yoko Ota. Hara, who was 1.2 kilometers from the hypocenter and escaped in a river by swimming upstream, wrote the short story Natsu no Hana (The Flower of Summer). He described his experience as follows:

While I was fleeing, I didn't even think that out of every two even one would survive. For seconds it seemed to me that I had suddenly understood the meaning of life. I was quite determined to put this experience on paper.<sup>21</sup>

In her short story, Shi no Machi (Town of Corpses), Yoko Ota also depicts her experience. The day after the bombing, on her way to the first aid post in the local hospital, she saw corpses lying everywhere; to her left, to her right, and even in the middle of the road. The faces of these corpses were all turned toward the hospital. Some of them were lying on their stomachs, some on their backs, all over the place. All of them were facing the

hospital. These corpses looked like ugly rubber dolls. At the sight of them, Ota broke into tears. She wished to paint these dead figures, though her young sister asked her reproachfully, "Sister, how could you draw such terrible things?" Ota responded, saying,

I observe everything with two different eyes: with the human eye and with the observing eye of the writer. At some stage, I have to write down what I experienced because it is the writer's duty to record the events she witnesses in literary form.<sup>32</sup>

Both Hara and Ota, like other A-bomb writers, had to undergo extreme distresses and torments. Hara continually suffered from hallucinations after the bombing. When President Truman, during the Korean War, issued his declaration about possible use of the atomic bomb, Hara finally was overcome by his fear that the bomb might be used again. He jumped to his death in front of a train.

In Ota's case, she continued to write what she observed on August 6 and the days after the bombing despite constant pressure from the occupation censorship, which had a very detrimental psychosomatic effect on her. She experienced a neurotic condition and acute stomach cramps. The general population, however, reacted with fear to the censorship of the occupation forces, who were trying to make the atomic bomb a taboo subject. The predominant feeling of society was: "We don't want to hear or read anything about the cruelty of the A-bomb." Their anger and hatred of the A-bomb were often directed toward those writers who dealt

publicly with the topic of the bomb and its consequences. Their writings were not recognized as literary works. Ota was no exception. She was rejected by the masses and also alienated from the National Authors' Association. Eventually she failed as a person and a writer. She, like many other A-bomb writers experiencing what she did, died without peace of mind.

In contrast to the suppressed description of the human consequences of the use of the A-bomb and the misery it caused, publicity about the power of the bomb was warmly welcomed by General Headquarters of the Occupation Forces. A group of American reporters who visited Hiroshima on September 3, 1945 expressed satisfaction at the total destruction of the city and extolled the obvious superiority of the bomb's potential. At a press conference, they were asked by Japanese reporters questions from the standpoint of the victims: Would Hiroshima be uninhabitable for seventy-five years? Would the atomic bomb contribute to world peace? The American reporters refused to respond to such questions. Their concern was solely with the power of the bomb; its victims interested them only as proof of that power.<sup>33</sup>

After the war, the A-bomb was described to the Japanese people only as "a new type of bomb" in order to soften anti-U.S. sentiment. Its true atomic and radioactive nature was not disclosed. Congruently, all appeals for

medical help based on the unique damage and effects of the A-bomb were banned.

How much the Japanese government and occupation forces really suspected about the effects of radiation is uncertain. But it is now known that the General Headquarters of the Occupation Forces and Japanese officials decided in early September of 1945 that people likely to die from A-bomb afflictions were not worth trying to save.<sup>34</sup>

In March, 1947, the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) began its research. The ABCC was set up under a U.S. presidential order to study the effects of radiation on the victims. The commission was a joint Japanese-American venture which used some scientists from the Japanese Institute of Health.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, occupation policies created strict controls over all Japanese research into A-bomb affairs. Japanese scientists could neither conduct studies on A-bomb damage without permission, nor could they publish their results. These restrictions continued until the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951.

The ABCC did extensive research with the cooperation of the hibakusha, but never gave the results to them. Some hibakusha felt that they were treated like "human guinea pigs" for research purposes. Others became resentful and

suspected the data might be used for preparation for another nuclear war.

One of the victims I interviewed in Hiroshima was very pointed in her criticism of the ABCC.<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Nenjun So, a Korean hibakusha, who lost all five of her children to the bomb and was herself critically burned, was cooperating with the ABCC research after the war. In the meantime, she had become pregnant again. Following repeated x-rays by the ABCC, despite her objection, she suffered a miscarriage. "Even new life was taken away," she said to me. This compound tragedy and her suspicion that the research was being done to prepare for another nuclear war moved her to begin speaking out against all war, which she now identified as the real cause of her suffering.

A sense of alienation was the hibakusha's natural reaction to the attitudes and policies of the government. Besides these policies which seemed insensitive to the feelings of hibakusha, the government failed to provide any help for their economic and health needs. Although the agency for reconstruction from the calamities of the war announced the City Plan for Reconstruction of Hiroshima in November, 1946, the government took no measures to legislate a relief law for the A-bomb survivors.<sup>36</sup> This was partly for purely fiscal reasons and partly to continue the pretense of innocence regarding responsibility for the war. Thus most of the hibakusha needed to struggle to make a

living while contending with their illnesses. Many were compelled to live on very low incomes. Though suffering from external disorders such as keloids and from chronic A-bomb diseases, and unable to reconstruct their lives due to personal losses and economic deprivation, the hibakusha were left with no choice but to accept their misfortune as a tragic but inevitable "sacrifice for the sake of peace."

On the international scene, the United States held a nuclear monopoly until 1949, when Russia entered the competition with the development of a nuclear bomb. Thereafter, nuclear arsenals expanded and the cold war set in. Nuclear weapons were declared essential to preserve peace, and a worldwide "rationale for peace" was promoted to support nuclear deterrence policy. In other words, "atomic bombs and nuclear weapons are symbols of peace; those who are victimized by these weapons are disturbers of the peace." This bizarre rationale for nuclear weapons was endorsed by the Japanese government.<sup>37</sup> It caused confusion, misdirection and obstruction in the hibakusha's efforts to interpret their losses and injuries.

Both this international justification of the bombs and the aforementioned press censorship meant neglect of the hibakusha in their time of greatest need. Since not even the obvious immediate effects of the bomb on humans could be reported, little sympathy could be expected and

even less assistance was likely. Furthermore, everyone was preoccupied with his or her own survival during the post-war period, so there was little public pressure on the government to provide aid for the hibakusha.

But finally in 1957, reacting to public pressure which had grown by then, the government legislated the "Medical Treatment Law for A-bomb Sufferers." It provided for (1) annual medical examinations, (2) health books (for certification and records) indicating official recognition by the Ministry of Public Health as bomb related those diseases clearly related to radioactivity, and (3) treatment of the diseases upon confirmation at government expense. Certified victims under the law must have been within approximately 4 kilometers of the hypocenter, early entrants into the city, or fetuses of victim mothers. Actual "recognition" in 1957 was only 1,091, or .54% of the 200,284 registered A-bomb sufferers.

Even among those fortunate enough to be certified as patients, some were and are afraid to take advantage of their status because of fear of prejudice. This tendency was particularly strong among young women who were afraid of experiencing marriage discrimination once they were known to be hibakusha. Besides, there were many who could not even afford to buy the quilt they had to take with them to the hospital. For some, their symptoms were serious enough to require immediate hospitalization; but when they were the



only breadwinners in the family, they could not afford the loss of income hospitalization would bring. It was preferable to line up with others for a day-labor job, even though the work would definitely shorten their years left to live.<sup>38</sup>

In other ways, the Medical Treatment Law's provisions were extremely inadequate. This was true especially for those who were suffering from mental or emotional disturbances. Besides confirmed organic illnesses, hibakusha often demonstrated abnormal physical conditions which were apparently psychosomatic in origin. These effects, derived from emotional trauma, still are not adequately understood.

For instance, hibakusha with neurasthenia were left without any assistance or cure. The symptoms of neurasthenia or neurosis are "general fatigue, poor memory, dizziness, heavy head, headache, and no tolerance for either mental work or mental shock."<sup>39</sup> The victims suffer a total lack of patience, motivation, and energy to work to the point where they feel like doing absolutely nothing, especially in hot weather. Popularly this is called "bura-bura sickness" among Japanese. "Bura-bura" means loitering or being loose. Hibakusha with generalized fatigue are often accused of being lazy or inefficient, and are often subjected to discrimination since they have to rest frequently, taking off two to three days after one

day's work. The patients with intolerance to mental shock are easily frightened by a mere sound, even that of others sneezing, by a flash of light, by wind, lightning, or earthquake.<sup>40</sup> It seems very likely that the neurasthenia has been induced by the excessive stress of the bomb, but the government has chosen not to acknowledge that. Apparently by underestimating the bombing's full human effects, including psychoneurological disorders, the government has found a way to avoid full responsibility for compensating the victims.

To this day, the government has not passed an A-bomb victims' relief law. It is a fact of life in Japan that the government is reluctant to allocate any more additional money for the help of hibakusha while it is willing to appropriate a generous 3 billion yen (\$12 million) apiece for the Self-Defense Force jet trainers.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the conditions of economic deprivation among hibakusha have been all the more difficult to accept because of the general economic progress which followed the war. The rapid growth of Japan's industries created wealth and a style of living which made the hibakusha's plight seem especially stark by contrast. Even now, some hungry A-bomb casualties can barely scrape up the few hundred yen needed for two quarts of cheap foreign rice. Hibakusha are forced to bear the brunt of the scars and the lingering poverty of war.

The alienation felt by hibakusha because of their

abandonment by the government is compounded by the prejudice and attitudes of people closer at hand. In the early days, lack of knowledge about the physical effects resulted in unwarranted prejudice against hibakusha. Common ideas included these: "A-bomb diseases are contagious," "Keloids lead to cancer," and "Hibakusha are dirty." Later, though, when information about the biological effects of radiation became clearer, discrimination against hibakusha increased.

Yet without understanding the heightened anxiety of the hibakusha over their health and possible genetic damage, society, especially outside Hiroshima and Nagasaki, often shuns the hibakusha as "carriers of the death spirit." Furthermore, non-hibakusha often express irritation that the hibakusha "always complain and are too over-conscious of being victims" or are "politically motivated."

Many hibakusha have, as a matter of fact, chosen to remain silent. This is one way to avoid discrimination. They recognize the futility of any effort to communicate verbally the psychic trauma involved in their ordeal. Silence may be the most realistic response for some, since those who have never experienced a similar survival experience can hardly comprehend it from a verbal description.

Discrimination in marriage has been another source of alienation for hibakusha. "Don't marry a woman from Hiroshima or Nagasaki" used to be a common expression among

men in Japan. But discrimination has been experienced by men also. According to a 1965 government survey, 4.1% of all unmarried survivors reported encountering discrimination in attempts to marry. In the age group 30-39, 12.1% of unmarried males and 11.1% of unmarried females reported such prejudice.<sup>42</sup> Four decades after the bombing, discrimination, though covert, still continues. It is not only against hibakusha themselves, but also against their children when they try to find marriage partners. (This accounts for the decision by some hibakusha to keep silence about their experiences.) Many hibakusha have now become grandparents. The effect of radiation on the reproductive process is still a matter of great concern. How will it affect the coming generations? It is a matter of great anguish to many hibakusha and a legitimate concern to prospective marriage partners.

For many years after the war, when public baths were common in Japan, many hibakusha were afraid and ashamed to go there because of their keloids and abnormal amount of falling hair while shampooing.

Ichiro Kawamoto, who entered Hiroshima from a neighboring district as part of a rescue team after the bombing, recalls his experience of going to a bath which was a shared facility in his dormitory:

For a while after the bombing, whenever I washed my hair, alot of it fell out. How frightened and anxious I was! I had to wait until all my colleagues finished their baths—that was always around midnight. I turned

off all the lights and took a bath quietly because I didn't want others to know about it.<sup>43</sup>

The keloids, as overt and visible evidences of the bomb's effects, are another cause of problems for many hibakusha even to this day. Bearers of keloids are sometimes treated as lepers. The association of the keloids with radiation, death and the bomb causes many people to keep their distance from the scarred survivors.

In particular, young girls with disfiguring scars on face, head, or limbs suffered very severely both with physical and mental distress. Michiko Yamaoka, who has keloid scars on her face despite plastic surgery 39 times in 39 years, shared some of her stories with me. She was a junior high school student when she was burned by the bomb.

When I happened to see my deformed face on a piece of glass for the first time—that was several months after the bombing—I could hardly believe my eyes. The image I saw there frightened me. It didn't look like a human face, but a beast's. I felt chilled along my spine and my heart suddenly shrank.

For awhile I secluded myself at home and spent hours before the mirror looking at my own face. What I saw was an ugly chunk of flesh, like lava oozing from a crater wall, covering almost half of my face, with the eyebrows burned off and my eyes and lips pulled out of shape. My neck was pulled over to one side. No matter how hard I tried to straighten it, it wouldn't move back to the normal position.

I hated people's cold, unfriendly stares at me, as if they were looking at a monster. In order to avoid even the slightest sinister look, I wore a big surgical mask. But once I came into sight of children my age on the street, they laughed at me, saying, "Pikadon is coming. Pikadon is coming." (Pika is the flash and don is the sound at the time of the A-bomb explosion.) The pain of anger and misery pierced my heart like a needle.<sup>44</sup>

Yamaoka also recalls these experiences:

My memory of my aunt is imprinted in my mind. I visited her some time after the bombing. When she opened the door, she gave a harsh look and asked me, "Who are you? I don't know such a beast-like woman," and she shut the door. Because of my terrible keloids, even my aunt could not recognize me.

A few years later, I overheard my relatives whispering to each other, "How could Michiko get married with such awful keloids on her face and body?" The A-bomb destroyed my life by depriving me of all possibilities in my youth.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, she never has married; and finding employment has always been difficult for Yamaoka. She has been forced to bear not only scars but also her painful psychological burden day and night.

Problems with employment are not unique to Yamaoka. As mentioned earlier, the real physical disabilities, compounded by unfair discrimination, made a viable economic life difficult for many hibakusha. "Don't hire those from Hiroshima and Nagasaki or you will end up losing money for their medical expenses" has been one of the typical attitudes. This reputation for recurrent sickness (often, of course, well founded) continues to be a major roadblock to good employment.

Over the years, the employment rate of male hibakusha has been lower than the national average, while that of female hibakusha has been higher, only because female wages are generally lower than those of males. The relatively high rates of employment of female hibakusha, therefore, do not reflect an absence of discrimination; for most are self-employed at some small enterprise or engaged

in day labor. Because many women lost not only their husbands, but also all close adult relatives, and/or because they have been subject for discrimination in marriage, many hibakusha families are headed by women. These female household heads are forced to work just to maintain minimum levels of livelihood for themselves and their children. Unable to save money for retirement, these women must continue working into old age.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 484. Hereafter cited as Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

<sup>2</sup>Robert J. Lifton, Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima (New York: Random House, 1967), 27.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 480.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 483-484.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 488.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 497.

<sup>8</sup>Masuji Ibuse, Kuroi Ame (Black Rain) (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1966), 76.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>10</sup>Bakushinchi No Yoru (The Night at the Hypocenter), television broadcast on August 6, 1981 by Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation). Translation by the writer from a videotape.

<sup>11</sup>Lifton, 500.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>13</sup>Translated by the writer from a videotape of the interview made on October 15, 1983.

<sup>14</sup>Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 485f.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 485.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Lifton, 58.

<sup>18</sup>Translated by the writer from the videotape of an interview made on November 10, 1983.



<sup>19</sup>Lifton, 83.

<sup>20</sup>Masaharu Hamatani, "Genbaku No Motarasu Ningenteki Kuno" ("Human Suffering Caused by the Atomic Bomb") published in Yuzo Mizoguchi, ed., Genbaku: Senso Taiken To Sozoyoku (The Atomic Bomb: War Experiences and Imagination) (Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronsha, 1980) 1-17.

<sup>21</sup>Seiichi Nakano, Hiroshima: Genbaku Saigai No Tsumeato (Hiroshima: Wounds of Atomic Bomb Casualties) (Kyoto: Sorinsha, 1982) 129-137.

<sup>22</sup>Setsuko Minami, ed., Konoha no Yoni Yokare te (Burned Like Leaves) (Tokyo: Rodo Kyoiku Center, 1981) 24.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>29</sup>Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 496

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Sadako Kurihara, The Songs of Hiroshima (Hiroshima: Anthology Publishing Association, 1980) 18.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 15.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>35</sup>Videotaped in her hospital room on October 16, 1983.

<sup>36</sup>Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 554.

<sup>37</sup>Takeshi Ito, "Genbaku Higai No Konnichitaki Imi" ("The Meaning of Atomic Bomb Damages Today") published in Yuzo Mizoguchi, ed., Genbaku: Senso Taiken To Sozoyoku (The Atomic Bomb: War Experiences and Imagination) (Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronsha, 1980) 73-74.

<sup>30</sup>Ken Domon, Living Hiroshima (Tokyo: Tsukiji Shokan, 1978) viii.

<sup>31</sup>Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 249.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Domon, viii.

<sup>42</sup>"A Government Survey of Atomic Bomb Survivors" Japan Quarterly 14:3 (1967) 283.

<sup>43</sup>Translated by the writer from a videotape of an interview made on October 13, 1983.

<sup>44</sup>Translated by the writer from a videotape of an interview made on November 8, 1983.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### SPIRITUAL PARALYSIS OF THE CHURCH

In this chapter I will present a brief description of the current psychological state of the United States' population (and much of the Christian Church) in regards to the nuclear threat. People who have never experienced what the foregoing chapters describe are nevertheless living in the shadow of the bomb. Many are incapable of dealing with that fact because of their current mode of thinking. I choose to call the modern psychological state "spiritual paralysis" because people are unable to respond to God's call for wholeness in their lives. The fear of the bomb, often at sub-conscious levels, evokes a variety of immobilizing psychological responses which I will discuss.

Although some church leaders and agencies of some churches are faithfully calling for serious facing of the nuclear threat today, the general population seems uninterested and uninvolved. They pursue their daily lives as they allow the building of incinerators far more dangerous than the ones they fault the Germans of the Nazi era for allowing. Few people are willing to face the profound implications of global nuclear devastation. Why is this?

In religious terms, the present state can be described as "spiritual paralysis." There seems to be no

spiritual energy to break out of the complacency with the political status quo. People in churches in the United States generally manifest no more zeal for altering our path toward nuclear destruction than the average person on the street. They pay their taxes and vote for representatives who continue the arms race. Christ's call to be peacemakers is rarely heeded. The continuing presence of nuclear weapons "stands as a statement of our own infidelity, and of our choice for death."<sup>1</sup> The passive acceptance of nuclear weapons thereby has a numbing effect on our total being.

Psychologists have probably done more than theologians in assessing this "spiritual paralysis." Lifton asserts that there is a growing awareness of the possibility of collective death, but that awareness gets covered over by "psychic numbing"<sup>2</sup> (the same phenomenon among the hibakusha described in chapter 3). His term has become standard vocabulary for anyone interested in the subject.

Drawing on Lifton and others, Joanna Rogers Macy presents a compact but comprehensive description of the psychological responses to the planetary peril in her ground-breaking book, Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age.<sup>3</sup> She reports that surveys show over 66% of Americans consider that a nuclear war is likely to occur sometime in the future.<sup>4</sup> The ways people respond to this prospect range through anger, fear, sorrow, and guilt; but

on the whole, we as a society are caught between a sense of imminent disaster and the fear of acknowledging it. In this "caught place," our responses are stifled. Our anxieties are so frustrating and problematic that we have developed a psychic numbness or seeming apathy about the whole issue. This apathy (from the Greek word, apatheia, meaning non-suffering) is our way of refusing to experience the pain inherent in our situation. The entire quality of our lives is diminished by this choice to avoid the pain.

Disbelief, denial, and the double life are the widespread methods of avoidance, according to Macy.<sup>5</sup> Disbelief is the inability to acknowledge the existence of nuclear weapons; their existence remains purely abstract.<sup>6</sup> Modern people find it hard to believe we are developing weapons capable of blowing up all that our civilization has created. Incidentally, this disbelief has often been fostered by conflicting and illusory view of the nuclear threat pronounced by scientific experts.

In fact, what we don't know about the deadly consequences of nuclear war far exceeds the knowledge we presently have. For instance, only two decades ago, we thought we knew enough to expose several hundred thousand U.S. military personnel to exercises involving major nuclear tests. Now, many years later, these men are contracting leukemia in abnormal numbers. We know or think we know a great deal about the effects of nuclear warfare and nuclear production. This is a dangerous illusion of our time. We have only begun to chart the unknown.<sup>7</sup>

Persistent disbelief leads naturally to denial, the refusal to face and admit the frightening possibility of

annihilation. This mode of adaption allows us to get on with our more manageable personal concerns. But the attitude of denial may also involve a fatalistic resignation toward potential annihilation.

Stunned by the prospect of so immense an atrocity, the human mind is tempted to acquiesce to the triviality of its own existence. It is tempted to say, as Lifton reports hearing in the halls of his university, "What's so special about human beings?"<sup>9</sup>

"Double life" is the third method of avoidance. The pressing possibility of thermonuclear destruction changes everything in us and in our relationships, yet paradoxically it seems to change nothing and is apparently ignored by nearly everyone nearly all of the time. "For in order to go about 'business as usual,' one has to deaden one's feelings about what one knows."<sup>9</sup> We are involved then "not so much in an age of anxiety as an age of numbing, because there is an increasing gap between knowledge and feeling."<sup>10</sup>

The result of these defense mechanisms is a break in the mental connection between our routine work-a-day world and our sense of the future. It is a break in the thread of imagination that normally ties our present life to the life of future generations. Lifton puts it this way:

The image of a destructive force of unlimited dimensions in both explosive power and in poisoning the environment—or some fragments of that image—enters into every relationship involving parents, children, grandparents, and imagined great-grandparents, great-grandchildren. The image is usually very much in the background, but is readily activated by a variety of stimuli from actual nuclear sword-rattling to relatively obscure antagonisms anywhere on our planet. We are thus among the first to live with a recurrent sense of

biological severance... If we anticipate the possibility of nuclear weapons being used—as I believe everyone in our society from about the age of six or seven in some measure does—we can hardly be certain of descendants in whom to "live on." In such a "postnuclear" world, that is, we can imagine no biological posterity."<sup>11</sup>

The image of nuclear annihilation may be a greater threat to self than either the possibility of one's own death or the actual death of intimate others. For the self is a symbolic entity which is not restricted to its physical habitation. It can and does identify with living processes which transcend an individual life and body. In fact, the vitality of the self is strengthened by imagining its place in the life of progeny, family, organizations, communities, and humanity itself. But the nuclear images block these symbolic ways to animate the self.

There is a strong parallel between the state of mind of people in the nuclear age and the survivor mentality of the hibakusha. One middle-aged hibakusha I interviewed in Hiroshima recalled the dislocation his experience caused him:

I felt as if the entire world were burning. When I found out that almost all of my family and many of my schoolmates and teachers were killed by the bomb, I wished I would have died with them. Standing alone in the dead town where all human activity had ceased, I felt surrounded by a kind of cosmic terror or absorbed into a cyclone of strange silence. I felt so empty that even my self seemed to be disappearing into the darkness of death and meaninglessness. My life since then is a constant struggle to find a reason to live.<sup>12</sup>

Our suppressed images of nuclear holocaust block any bold and full sense of our human future, any connection of

our self with future generations. Hence, the search for self-fulfillment is pursued within the narrow confines of a contemporary moment in history. The moral and spiritual ramifications of this are considerable because of the diminution in the value of moral behavior and the constriction on the life of the spirit. Until we find ways of acknowledging and integrating our deep level of anguished awareness and ways of dealing with our hidden fears of nuclear annihilation, we will remain drained of the energy necessary for creative, moral and spiritually-enriching responses.



## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Denise Priestley. Bringing Forth in Hope (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983) 36.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Jay Lifton. Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima (New York: Random House, 1967) 32-34.

<sup>3</sup>Joanna Rogers Macy, Despair and Personal Power in a Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: New Society, 1983) 4-17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>John C. Culver. "Dangerous Illusions" Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (September 1979) 39.

<sup>8</sup>Macy, 6.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Jay Lifton. The Broken Connection (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979) 366.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Jay Lifton. "Beyond Nuclear Numbing" Teachers College Record 84:1 (Fall 1982) 25.

<sup>11</sup>Lifton, The Broken Connection, 338.

<sup>12</sup>Translated from a videotape of my interview with Hiroshi Morishita on November 10, 1983.

## Chapter 5

### IMAGES OF HOPE FROM THE BIBLE AND FROM HIROSHIMA

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the Biblical motifs of divine restoration in Ezekiel and the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and relate them to the hopeful symbols of the oleander and the paper crane from Hiroshima. Hope will be seen as a gift of God growing out of a full acknowledgment of the evil and darkness which is in us and around us. Finally, I will show how the hibakusha remaining today are recovering from their psychic numbing, experiencing a resurrection after the almost literal death of their psyches. They suggest a pattern or model which could be an answer to the contemporary spiritual paralysis.

#### Symbols of Hope from Hiroshima

Three months after the bombing of Hiroshima, out of the ashes the oleander began to grow, despite the common belief that all life was destroyed in the radioactive wasteland. In fact, oleander, a native of the East Indies, grows and flourishes under adverse conditions: it even thrives on heat and smog. The birth of the oleander gave strength to the people of Hiroshima. It gradually helped

turn their apathy and despair into the determination to rebuild their city. Hope was sprung out of their hopeless situation.

Some hibakusha have, however, expressed to me their discomfort with the red color of some blossoms because it reminds them of the burned flesh and blood of the victims of the bombing. Furthermore, though all the parts of oleander are poisonous to eat as if it had absorbed all the poison of the radiation inside itself, it blooms beautifully. The life of the oleander and the people of Hiroshima are associated in my mind with the images of Jesus' cross and resurrection: Jesus taking the sins of humanity on himself at the crucifixion and bringing forth new life. Emerging as hope in a hopeless situation, oleander, which was the city flower of Hiroshima before the bombing, gained new meaning in the experience of the hibakusha.

Hope is the decision to which God always invites people. No matter how bleak things appear, God invariably gives a word of a beginning that would transform history. Just when we think God has abandoned a situation, we find God right in the center of it, announcing hope.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the Hiroshima experience, this hope, symbolized in the growth of the oleander, was sprung in the hearts of the hibakusha.

One of the more popular but deeply meaningful symbols of hope from Hiroshima is the paper crane. The story of Sadako and the thousand cranes is now known by

every child in Hiroshima and by many children the world over. The story begins when Sadako Sasaki was two years old and the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Though she was living less than one mile from the hypocenter, she miraculously escaped, seemingly unharmed. She had been an active, healthy girl. Thus, her sudden collapse one day, nine years after the bombing, was a shock to all who knew her. Hospitalized for radiation sickness, her illness was diagnosed as acute leukemia.

Following a Japanese folk belief that one thousand paper cranes cure any illness, Sadako started folding cranes. But a year later, without completing her one thousand cranes, the young girl died.

In deep grief, Sadako's schoolmates gathered. They made up the difference and placed one thousand cranes in her coffin. Some of them had lost their parents in the bombing; some had lost their brothers and sisters during the past few years; some were frightened that they would wake up one morning with the dreadful radiation sickness as Sadako had. But all of them had the common fear and concern that the bomb might be dropped again, not just upon them, but also upon other parts of the world.

They did not, however, wait passively. They did not wait for adults to take the initiative in the work for disarmament. Instead, they themselves worked hard to build a monument in order to remind people of what the first

atomic bomb had done to the children of Hiroshima. On top of the monument stands a statue of a girl holding a crane in her outstretched hands.

Soon the children established a Folding Crane Club. They encouraged others to join in folding paper cranes. The paper crane has now become a universal symbol for the peace movement. The children send their paper cranes to the United Nations and to heads of governments, pleading for universal disarmament. With their cranes they visit lonely patients in the A-bomb Hospital. They also send cranes to children in other countries. Their peace activity is known everywhere. They fly with the cranes whose wings beat the sky all over the world. The power of the crane is hidden deep within its wings, waiting to take anyone to a peaceful future where there is no radiation sickness, no nuclear victims.

As they fold cranes, the children sing, hoping for a world without the threat of nuclear war: "We shall write peace on your wings, and you shall fly all over the world." Now visitors from all over the world present their folded cranes at the Children's Monument. Thus Sadako's story lives on. Not only in the hearts of children in Hiroshima, but in children all over the world, her hopeful spirit endures.

Even though Christian symbols are not endemic to Japanese culture, I see in the crane a symbol of hope and in

Sadako's story the theme of cross and resurrection. Little Sadako experienced death and total darkness, but her hopeful spirit comes to life in every paper crane folded today. As long as cranes are folded and a plea for world peace is made, Sadako's spirit lives on.

Today, when cranes are folded in her memory, people enter into the drama and tragedy of Sadako and her friends. Retelling her story renews the hearer's hopes for peace. Solidarity with past, present, and potential future victims of nuclear war is built. Death is not the end. Sadako lives today to challenge everyone to a new commitment for peace.

A related symbol of significance to me is the phoenix, which is believed to have the forehead of a crane. In ancient oriental symbolism, this mythological bird, a product of fire, is seen as benevolent. It does not injure or prey on living creatures nor tread upon living herbs. According to tradition, it appears only in times when reason prevails; it waits for a time of true peace and prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

In one thing at least, the hibakusha resemble the phoenix; their new consciousness is a product of fire. After witnessing massive and grotesque death, they have resurrected from the blazing fire. Unlike the phoenix, however, many bear burn scars (keloids) associated with their birthing into a new consciousness. Nevertheless, they emerge into a world where reason demands attention to their

plea for peace.

### Biblical Motifs of Divine Restoration in Ezekiel

Hope is the key concept for those in a threatened existence. The Biblical drama of the Hebrew people in exile is a good case in point. I would like to explore the foundations of hope found in Ezekiel 36: 16-38. The context of the text includes conditions resulting from the scourge of war, and the imagery of a plant growing in a once barren land<sup>4</sup> is also part of it. Because of these resonances with the hibakusha experience, it seems meaningful to introduce the text here.

According to the introductory words of Ezekiel<sup>1</sup>, he was called to be a prophet in 593 B.C.E. after he had experienced, with the upper strata of society and Jehoiachin's entourage, the deportation to Babylon in 597 B.C.E. There he was living with a group of exiles.

In his proclamations, Ezekiel takes away from his people every possibility of pride and makes clear their sinful corruption at its very roots. In fact, Ezekiel consummates the message of the other Hebrew prophets with his radical accusations and message of judgment upon his people.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Ezekiel also proclaimed a new future while destruction was running its full course and despair was forstalling all hope. His proclamation of a new future undoubtedly prevented the collapse of the people lost

in exile and turned them to face a new future. Ezekiel 36: 16-36 may give us one of the clearest proclamations in Hebrew Scriptures of the creation of a new future for God's people and the restoration of its devastated land.<sup>6</sup>

The text begins with a direct address of Yahweh to the prophet. Thematically it deals with Yahweh's reason for embarking on the task of returning the Israelites to the promised land: to end the profanation of Yahweh's name in the nations where the Israelites were dispersed. The oracle presupposes the exiled people in great distress over the loss of their homeland: for in introducing the central divine act of the new creation, Ezekiel looks back over Israel's hopelessly disastrous history which terminated in the dispersion of the people throughout other lands.<sup>7</sup>

Israel, to a large extent, had been laid waste by war. Its villages were burnt down and its cities were in ruin. This defeat, so destructive to Israel, was obviously the result of its sins; but what would happen was entirely unexpected. Israel, which seemed defenseless, losing all power of recovery, would survive to enjoy a period of prosperity to the incredulous amazement of the exiled inhabitants.

After experiencing judgment, which seemed to be the end of everything for the exiles, they receive this promise of regeneration once again. This time it emerges from a new depth of activity on Yahweh's part. The question of the



justification for Yahweh's act toward Israel is answered in  
vss. 22 & 23:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.<sup>8</sup>

It is the honor of the divine name that provides the grounds for the intervention of Yahweh.

The "name" appears in vss. 21-24 to be like a personal being, capable of suffering. Ezekiel 20: 5 links the election of Israel with this kind of personal involvement and vulnerability:

On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the seed of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God.<sup>9</sup>

But Yahweh's name, which Yahweh wants honored, also represents the faithfulness and power of Yahweh.<sup>10</sup> The name is personal and vulnerable, but also faithful and powerful.

The relationship between Yahweh, people, and land was an intimate one in the ancient Hebrew world. The Israelites were known as Yahweh's people and the land, as a result of Yahweh's gift to the patriarchs, had become "the land of Israel." But due to the unfaithfulness of the Israelites and the resulting exile, the ancient triad of Yahweh, people, and land had been broken. Inasmuch as

foreign nations questioned the power of Israel's God to maintain his people on his land, they treated his name as a profane thing.<sup>11</sup> (The masculine pronoun for God is maintained throughout this section because of the patriarchal context out of which the text arises.) The nations were speaking of a powerless Yahweh,<sup>12</sup> who could no longer hold together land and people, on both of which Yahweh's name lay.<sup>13</sup>

But this profanation was not Yahweh's fault. It was, rather, the people in exile who made Yahweh's name profane, insofar as on account of their wicked past they had to be banished from Yahweh's land by him. So, for the restoration to be a meaningful vindication of the holy name, the people needed to be transformed.<sup>14</sup> In the face of God's faithfulness in carrying out the promise given to the forefathers, the nation at last comes to realize how deep their disloyalty has been. Similarly the church today needs to recognize the depth of its disloyalty by its trust in nuclear weapons for security. It needs to identify the evil, face it honestly, and pursue repentance, assured that God who is faithful to God's promises will forgive and restore.

The question posed to the exilic community in Ezekiel's time was: "How can the holy one possibly forgive his sinful people whom he has had to drive away on account of his holiness?"<sup>15</sup> God had a plan, according to

Ezekiel. The coming renewal of the nation was to take place in three stages:

1. Ritual washings for purification.<sup>16</sup> The uncleanness and idolatry representing the past must be forgiven, ie. cleansed, before the new estate can take effect.

2. The gift of a new heart and new spirit for their inner life.<sup>17</sup> The heart to the Hebrews was regarded as the seat of understanding and responsible behavior, and the human spirit the seat of the disposition and the principle of life. Together they describe the will and temperament of the person.<sup>18</sup> When God takes away their "heart of stone" and gives them a "heart of flesh," the heart which remained deaf to the call of obedience will become alive. "The word 'new,' which Jeremiah 31: 31 associated with the covenant, is here associated with the heart, which changes as a result of God's new activity."<sup>19</sup> Through this new heart and spirit, Yahweh enables the Israelites to fulfill his commands and become his people once again. Here is the answer to "spiritual paralysis." A "heart of flesh" in the church will allow it to feel the pain of the hibakusha and to be obedient to the call of God.

3. The putting of Yahweh's spirit in the human heart, whereby the new being finds its full strength.<sup>20</sup> The divine spirit is a power which gives humans strength to do new things.<sup>21</sup> "New things" here means the

fulfilling of the covenant law. For in the disobedience of pre-exilic Israel, the nation had broken away from the ordinances of the covenant and had neglected God's will as laid down in the covenant law. Israel was incapable, by her very nature, of obedience. Thus, putting the divine spirit in the people allows Yahweh to participate directly in the new obedience of Israel.<sup>22</sup> The activity of God makes repentance and obedience possible. Furthermore, this obedience is the precondition for remaining in the land, and the covenant formula is used to describe the new situation of the people:

You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.<sup>23</sup>

This is the definitive realization of what Yahweh intended from the very beginning for his people in the covenant.<sup>24</sup>

Israel's restoration must never become a source of self-congratulation as if the Israelites themselves have contributed anything toward it. Yahweh has acted for his own sake, not theirs. The object of Yahweh's act of redemption is that Israel should finally be delivered from all self-glorification and self-righteous pride in terms of election, which has led it so often to misuse the good gifts of Yahweh and which has rendered it incapable of performing its duty toward the world.<sup>25</sup> Yahweh has acted in spite of the people, so that the restoration of the land might be recognized as the work of Yahweh. Israel's forgiveness and

new life is the free gift of Yahweh who is true to himself.

In light of this, it is important to point out that the hibakusha are not a people to be glorified for their own sake. They would be the first to admit that hope and new life break out as much in spite of them as because of them. The mystery of God's activity in their midst is something that several hibakusha have related to me.<sup>26</sup>

Ezekiel further proclaims that Yahweh will create for himself an obedient people and will also give the honor of new fruitfulness to the land. This promise of new fruitfulness is a lively hope for the returning exiles. Deliverance from uncleanness is linked with abundant growth of grain and removal of famine.<sup>27</sup> Israel's inner renewal appears to be closely bound up with the changes in the external life of the country such as transformation of the old homeland into a "Garden of Eden."<sup>28</sup> Inward and outward fulfillment mutually correspond.<sup>29</sup>

On the day of divine cleansing from guilty deeds, the rebuilding of the settlements will take place.<sup>30</sup> The devastated fields will again be cultivated so that observers round about will witness the miracle of rebuilding: the land that previously lay waste will now be a paradise garden of the greatest fertility.<sup>31</sup> (I cannot help but remember the tremendous harvest of vegetables a few years after the bombing in Hiroshima.) Devastated cities will be reinhabited<sup>32</sup> and the population will increase.<sup>33</sup> The imagery of new life out

of desolation continues in the next chapter with the well-known vision of the valley of the dry bones.

Where restoration and hope are revealed today, we can see the work of God, for God is the author of hope. It would be a mistake to force parallels between exiled Israel and bombed Hiroshima. But neither would have survived without the impetus of hope. The oracle through Ezekiel gave Israel hope. Hiroshima has found hope as symbolized in the oleander and the folded paper crane. The link between Hiroshima and exiled Israel is hope emerging out of a hopeless situation. Divinely proclaimed hope prevents people from being lost in chaos and despair.

Ezekiel declares that God will once again dwell in the midst of his people. This expectation provides the basis for the fullest hope and also enables the people to step out with the fullest confidence toward their future. All authentic hope derives from the promises of God. As a Christian, this is my interpretation of Hiroshima. It is an interpretaion not intended to preclude any other way of celebrating the hope arising out of meaninglessness.

Under the impact of {Ezekiel's} prophetic statement in the night of exile the miracle happens: a despairing people are renewed to become a people of expectation and finally a people moving confidently into a future of deliverance.<sup>34</sup>

These words could just as well describe the experience of the transformed hibakusha. They too have experienced a miracle in the night of their despair. Hope has emerged

to guide them toward the future, a future which they strive mightily to insure will be free of nuclear weapons and war.

### The Cross and the Resurrection

Denise Priestley suggests that we need symbols that are deep enough and strong enough to match the terms and power of the reality of possible annihilation: symbols which can help us interpret our situation.<sup>35</sup> Without adequate symbols, we cannot bring to expression what has been happening to us. Among these kinds of symbols are the cross and the resurrection.

In Christian theology, the cross and resurrection are dialectically intertwined. Emphasis on either at the expense of the other inevitably leads to a distortion of reality and of Christian faith. Jurgen Moltmann has developed this theme extensively in The Crucified God.<sup>36</sup> He argues convincingly that we need to comprehend the crucified Christ in the light and context of his resurrection, and we need to comprehend the resurrected Christ in the light of his ignominious crucifixion.

Similarly, I would affirm that in order to find hope (resurrection motif) in the face of the nuclear threat, we need to identify with the suffering (crucifixion motif) of the hibakusha. For this purpose, we need the sensitive "hearts of flesh" Ezekiel described. Recognizing our interconnectedness with them and internalizing some of the

hibakusha's pain, lead us to hope and power to build a new community, a new world. If fear and apathy (non-caring) prevail, evil can have its way. The future will belong to it. But when deep empathy allows shared suffering, hope is dialectically brought to life and the future given new meaning.

We must strive to interpret the cross and resurrection theme in light of post-Hiroshima reality in a way that it can bear meaning adequate to the magnitude of the threat of nuclear holocaust. Our interpretation should guide us to a fresh understanding of reality and enable us to become passionately involved in God's work of preventing the annihilation of God's creation.

The cross prompts us to face the reality of pain in the world. At the center of God's revelation in Jesus is this experience of terrible suffering. Jesus experienced a death not only physically painful, but also emotionally and psychically wrenching. His powerful feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are well summed up in his utterance, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>37</sup> It was only because Jesus was willing to endure the pain and darkness of the cross that he was able to defeat the power of death. "Jesus gives assurance we can touch death and go through it and be transformed."<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, the historical cross is not ultimately a passive admission of weakness, for Jesus



consciously chose the path that led to the cross. His was a deliberate choice against conformity to the powers of darkness, the ways of the world. Rejecting the use of force, he made a radical, active statement of faith. He rejected the idolatry of trusting any means other than God to achieve his goals.

For us to confront the cross today is to see what put Jesus on the cross. We need to identify those evils Jesus spoke against: hunger for power, ethnocentricity, economic injustice, oppression of the poor.<sup>39</sup> We confront all of these evils when we address the nuclear problem; for it has often been pointed out that the massive use of resources for nuclear weapons has devastating social effects. Furthermore we have the idolatry of worshipping advanced technology in a manner which Lifton calls "nuclearism."<sup>40</sup> These evils are around us and part of us. They are part of the darkness that produced the Hiroshima experience, and they are part of what we must deal with as we strive for a genuine hope arising from the resurrection.

Ultimately the resurrection vindicated the rightness of Jesus' choice of faithfulness to God alone. His seeming weakness and defeat actually resulted in total victory. When we reject humanity's drift toward destruction, when we reject the idolatry of dependence on nuclear weapons for our security, we may appear weak in the eyes of world whose idea of power is predominantly mechanistic and technological.

But only when we identify and confront the evil are we able to envision and hope for a future without nuclear weapons.

The cross and resurrection symbol takes us beyond what is given in our situation. Because of it, we do not have to "settle for the present as the only reality."<sup>41</sup> It inspires and challenges us to choose the way that leads to life. The cross awakens us from nuclear numbness and illuminates the forces that threaten the existence of God's creation.

The cross (as immersion in the suffering of hibakusha) prompts the movement from the self-destructive stance of apathy and denial toward a stance of honestly facing the nuclear problem, identifying oneself as responsible to the problem, and joining with others and taking a stand. For when we begin to address and confront the grim issue of death and holocaust, it has the effect of putting us more in touch with what we most value in life, such as love, creativity, and the capacity for life projects that have meaning and significance for us. The journey to and through the cross is not actually a death trip, but rather quite the opposite. Life awaits on the other side. We can carry the cross because of God's faithfulness to God's promises. The journey to the cross erupts in life when we affirm the personal and corporate efforts we need to make for the sake of God's wondrous and threatened creation.

Without the cross there can be no resurrection.

Without a full openness to human misery, the concept of hope lacks depth and meaning. Moltmann has expressed the notion:

Hope for a new and different future is possible only among the suffering and the oppressed. Genuine future thus always focuses on the negativity of the present. And the ones who do hope and can hope for a genuinely new future are those who exist on the shadow side of the present.<sup>42</sup>

Most non-hibakusha do not allow themselves to "exist on the shadow side of the present." It seems nearly impossible for those who have not experienced the bomb to comprehend the profundity and complexity of the sufferings of the victims of nuclear war. But immersion in the experiences of the hibakusha and empathetically sharing their sufferings is one way of moving toward an experience of genuine hope. That is why I make no apology for encouraging people in the church to feel deeply the pain of the hibakusha.

The parallel with intentional grief work may be instructive here. The process of facing the hurt and acknowledging the loss of loved ones allows the bereaved person to unblock suppressed energies and experience healing. In the same way, we open the flow of energy and hope when we face our often-hidden nuclear fears and feel the pain of the hibakusha.

Processes of growth are never pain-free or risk-free. We are all reluctant to acknowledge our feelings of despair, weakness, and pain, lest our faith be shaken. We are unwilling to embrace the darkness of the Hiroshima

experience or the current nuclear situation lest we lose our emotional moorings. And yet, in that very darkness, new birth can take place. In the darkness of Good Friday, in the terror-filled mystery of the cross, a great transformation began, as in the night of exile a despairing people were transformed into a people of expectation moving confidently into a future of deliverance.

#### Hope Immanent in the Lives of Hibakusha

Every time I visit Hiroshima, especially when interviewing hibakusha, I discover that, terrible as it was, the atomic experience has not only been survived but also transcended. Lifton's "death in life," wherein hibakusha identified with the dead to the point of almost feeling dead themselves, has been transformed by many of them into a "life in death." The hibakusha have begun to make something of universal value from the experience of "universal" death.

The extent of destruction can never be overestimated, and it is equally important not to underestimate the reconstruction which has taken place. Hiroshima has literally been re-born. The rebirth points to a transformation of the human spirit undergone by the hibakusha since their immersion in death in 1945. In Hiroshima I found people with a new consciousness born of their own nuclear experience or their ability to grasp the experience of others. I found unselfish, committed,

visionary people who have risen out of the ashes of the atomic bombing—people who are conscious of the world's extraordinary peril. Partisans of peace, they are the first victims of the bomb, reborn with a consciousness the rest of us will have to achieve if we too are not to suffer the atomic fate.

One such hibakusha is the poet, Sadako Kurihara, who was the 32-year-old mother of 6 and 8-year-old daughters in 1945. While others talk about "what if" nuclear war, Kurihara describes what already has happened to her people. In speeches and poems heard around the world, she shares her experience with the bombing.

After the bombing, the numbness resulting from the unspeakable catastrophe caused many hibakusha to become silent and apathetic. But Kurihara, along with Tomiaki Hosoda and a few other friends who had survived, published a special issue of the magazine Chugoku Bunka (Chugoku Culture) in March, 1946. This publication was subject to the censorship of the Allied Supreme Command and was extensively investigated by the Civil Information Department (CID) of the American forces. The special issue attracted a great deal of attention among the public, for it was the first Japanese literary publication about the atomic bomb. As mentioned in Chapter 3, there was hardly any opportunity to communicate the hibakusha's experiences to the public before 1952. Writing of the immediate post-war era has only

recently come to be recognized as genuine literature.

Part of the impetus for Kurihara's publication of her anti-war poems and literature was her experience of looking for a young neighbor girl named Sachiko all over the devastated city. The following poem describes her experience:

"Sachiko, who was killed by the Atomic Bomb"

Iwojima had fallen  
And Okinawa had gone to her death,  
Without even empty boxes returned for burial;  
The nation's cities had been burned to black  
nothingness.  
But there was to be more:  
On August 6, 1945,  
Beneath an azure sky of tranquility,  
With a quilted-cotton air-raid hood tossed over your  
shoulder,  
You set out with your classmates to the task of house  
evacuation.

Suddenly

There was a brilliant white-hot flash.  
Buildings crumbled,  
Fires blazed,  
Smoke swirled all around,  
Wires dangled everywhere.  
And a writhing mass of humanity fled for safety.

It was three nights later that you came home—  
A lifeless body.  
It was a dark night, oppressed  
By the air-raid warning that had never been lifted.  
Hiroshima burned crimson in the black night.  
The entire country was in a deathwatch on the eve of  
defeat.  
That night,  
In a dark, curtained room,  
You were laid before the family altar;  
A white handkerchief covered your face.

In the gathering dusk of evening  
We had searched the classrooms of Koi Public School.  
Where crazed refugees raced wildly about  
Shrieking like savage beasts,

Where blistered human figures lay groaning,  
 Men indistinguishable from women,  
 Still living, but reeking of death.  
 We had finally found you  
 Among the bodies that looked like heaps of tattered rags  
 On the dirt floor of the makeshift morgue—  
 Only a metal tag told us it was you.  
 Someone had placed a white handkerchief  
 Over your face;  
 The handkerchief clung to your festered face  
 And could not be removed.

Sachiko,  
 You who were only a junior in girls' school,  
 You who never knew what the war was about,  
 You who died like a tiny bud plucked before flowering—  
 Your mother raised you up,  
 And draped a new, white, flower-patterned yukata  
 Over the tattered uniform seared permanently to your  
 skin.  
 "I made this for you," she said,  
 "But there was never a chance to have you wear it,  
 Because of the war."  
 Holding you still in her arms,  
 She broke down in uncontrollable tears.↵

Leaving her home in a suburb of Hiroshima, Kurihara entered the city on the day after the bombing. She saw corpses lying everywhere, on every side. Some were lying with their eyes still open. As she went on her way searching for Sachiko, she had to pass by numerous men and women asking for water. In the evening, light from the burning heaps of corpses helped show her the way. Vivid images of what she saw in the days after the bombing constitute the heart of her poetry.

When I talked with her on August 4, 1981 and again on October 14, 1983, she told me how much the experience with Sachiko had influenced her. Being a mother herself, Kurihara said she felt like screaming out to the whole

world, "All the mothers, rise! Let us join hands for peace lest your loved ones should be killed like Sachiko!" Out of her repeated encounter with so many deaths and overwhelmed by the grief of Sachiko's mother, she determined to record her experiences so that the world would know specifically what Hiroshima experienced. This was her resistance against anything which undermines the dignity of humanity. It was her way of affirming the meaning of life which came to her in the midst of the tragedy.

While "Sachiko" has become a symbol of the death of loved ones, Kurihara also wrote about giving birth in the midst of the barrenness of death. This poem is titled "May New Life Come Forth." It was written at the end of August, 1945, when people who were not suffering visible effects of the bomb suddenly started dying one after another from radiation sickness. The fear of probable death prevailed among the survivors. But even at such a time as that, new life had been born. Kurihara was fascinated by this true story of a life brought forth in the midst of a death-dominant time.

It was in the basement of a ruined building one night.  
The wounded from the Bomb  
Filled every corner.  
Sheer darkness. Not even a single candle was found.  
The smell of fresh blood and dead bodies.  
The stench of sweat; the sound of groans.  
From this, an eerie voice came floating to the ears,  
Saying, "A baby is coming!"  
In this basement, like the bottom of hell,  
At this very instant a young woman is in heavy labor.  
In the pitch darkness with not a single match there  
What could we possibly do?



Everyone was anxious, forgetting his own pain.  
 Then a voice murmured,  
 "I am a midwife; I'll do my best to help her give  
 birth."  
 The woman herself was seriously injured, groaning only a  
 moment before.  
 In the very bottom of the dark hell  
 A new life saw the light.  
 But the midwife, having no patience to wait for the  
 dawn,  
 Died covered with blood.  
 May new life come forth.  
 May new life come forth!  
 Though our lives may be lost.^^

Kurihara told me her interpretation of the poem. It  
 speaks of the birth of a new Hiroshima, a Hiroshima that  
 would never cease to long for peace in the world. This  
 birth of Hiroshima terminated a 15-year expansionist war  
 waged by Japanese imperialism in Asia, thus bringing forth a  
 light of hope as the birth in the dark basement had. During  
 the previous great wars, the Japanese-Chinese War and the  
 Russo-Japanese War, it was always Japan which invaded  
 foreign countries. Japan itself, however, had not been a  
 theater of war. But the Japanese military headquarters had  
 been located in Hiroshima during the wars with China and  
 Russia. From Kure, neighboring port to Hiroshima, warships  
 had been sent out. Subsequently, Japanese imperialist  
 expansion led to the Pacific War and the bombing of  
 Hiroshima.

Reflecting on Hiroshima's involvement in militarism,  
 Kurihara declares August 6 should be a day for Japanese to  
 repent for its numerous atrocities in Asia and in the  
 Pacific rather than merely to grieve; for there is a clear

cause-effect relationship between Hiroshima's participation in militarism and the bombing of the city. Though Hiroshima was born anew as a center for peace, the blood-covered midwife died before dawn. She was one of the 200,000 people killed by the bomb, one of those who died without experiencing the dawn of peace.

Kurihara told me about the life of the one born in the basement. Life there was given to a baby girl named Kazuko. The meaning of the characters used to write Kazuko's name in Japanese is "child of peace." Because of fear of discrimination against her, she and her family had long been silent about her background. But after Kazuko gave birth to her own son, she herself began to share her stories with the determination to create a world of peace.

As the birth of Kazuko happened in the midst of confusion and despair, a new Hiroshima was born out of destruction, chaos and hopelessness. It is in darkness that birth takes place: the darkness of a basement, the darkness of exile in Babylon, the darkness of Good Friday. It seems that some transcending element is impregnant in Hiroshima, some special grace to overcome the power of death. This might be the reason why many who have talked to hibakusha have had a conversion experience, as if they were touched by the power of the resurrected Christ. As the new life of Kazuko brought the light of hope into the dark basement, the new Hiroshima can be seen as "the light

shining in the darkness."<sup>45</sup>

By agreeing to be interviewed, the hibakusha allowed me to enter into the dark world of their powerful, deeply-internalized emotions. I felt their complex, intense feelings emerging alive in my presence. Many times I was overwhelmed by their expressions of fear and torment as they relived the hell of August 6, 1945 and the following days and months and years. But amazingly, it is the same hibakusha who declare the hope which arose as life came forth in the midst of waves of death—a transcending life which even the atomic bomb could not destroy. They are witnesses to life that overcame the power of death

The hibakusha like Kurihara, who shared these many stories with me, are not mighty heroes, but ordinary people—the only kind of heroes most people can ever hope to be. They are the kind of heroes who enter into the suffering of others; their sharing of common agonies is their common strength.

In the late sixties, hibakusha started gathering in small groups to share their personal life stories. In leaderless groups, they spoke with each other, sharing their worries about their health, concerns for their children, and their frustration and anger about the lack of understanding by the government and by non-hibakusha. Telling these stories broke the silence and taboo, enabling them to confront the oppressive milieu of the society. Telling

their stories also led to mutual understanding among the hibakusha, leading to a sense of community, to personal transformation, and to political action. The voices which tell the stories speak of common experience, common vulnerability, and common caring. "We know we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."<sup>46</sup> They came to what Bonhoeffer called "being for others." So the tragedy of the bombing actually led to the creation of a new kind of community, one in which a shared tremendous suffering united the members in bonds of love and caring.

Since the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the entire world has been drawn into a global community as nuclear weapons and new delivery systems have made it clear that all humanity is now a member of the same species at risk. The vulnerability that all the world has come to share should create a sense of true global community—with a common condition (the threat of the bomb), a common interest (avoiding the holocaust), and common resources (the spiritual, moral, and political vision to avert the catastrophe). Each country or individual is like a cell in the larger body. We now understand that we are equally at risk and share a common destiny. This profound interconnectedness and solidarity has been made concrete by the bombing of Hiroshima.

Like the Israelites in exile, our global community in nuclear bondage needs to hear the promise of hope. Like

the hibakusha, our world needs a vision of the power of life over death. The answer is not in wishful thinking or denial of the power of evil. Ezekiel never minimized the sins of Israel. The hibakusha cannot afford the luxury of simple "positive thinking." But they are witnesses to life that overcame the power of death. Could this be today's real miracle: a despairing people renewed to become a people of hope, moving into a future where there will be no more nuclear weapons, no more wars?

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Denise Priestley. Bringing Forth in Hope: Being Creative in a Nuclear Age (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983) 41.

<sup>2</sup>"A Thousand Cranes" Senba Zuru To Kodo Motachi (The Hornbook Magazine) (April 1963) 211-216.

<sup>3</sup>C.A.S. Williams. Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1941) 472.

<sup>4</sup>Ezekiel 36:36.

<sup>5</sup>Walther Zimmerli. Man and His Hope in the Old Testament (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1968) 117.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Walther Eichrodt. Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) 489-490.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, as are all subsequent Biblical quotations.

<sup>9</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>10</sup>Keith W. Carley. The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974) 243.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>cf. Exodus 32:12.

<sup>13</sup>Walther Zimmerli. Ezekiel 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 243-244.

<sup>14</sup>John W. Wevers, ed. Ezekiel (London: Nelson, 1969) 274.

<sup>15</sup>Carley, 243.

<sup>16</sup>Ezekiel 36:25.

<sup>17</sup>Ezekiel 36:26.

<sup>18</sup>Carley, 71.

<sup>19</sup>Zimmerli. Ezekiel 2, 249.

<sup>20</sup>Ezekiel 36:27.

<sup>21</sup>Zimmerli. Ezekiel 2, 249.

<sup>22</sup>Wevers, 275.

<sup>23</sup>Ezekiel 36:28.

<sup>24</sup>Zimmerli. Ezekiel 2, 249.

<sup>25</sup>Eichrodt, 504.

<sup>26</sup>Not all hibakusha would use the term "God." Those who are not Christian are more likely to say the "transcendent" was somehow involved in their survival and the "transcendent" gives new meaning and purpose to their lives. Because it was out of the ordinary to survive, something beyond the human dimension comes easily to mind.

On August 18, 1985, I interviewed Kazuko Watanabe in Santa Maria, California. She is a Christian high school teacher at my alma mater in Hiroshima. She describes the feeling of being transferred to an entirely different dimension at the time of the sudden blast. Her survival was mere chance because the chapel in which she was sitting was totally destroyed and people died all around her. In retrospect, she says, "It was nothing but the grace of God which saved me. I did not earn or deserve my survival. I feel as if I encountered God then. I cannot explain by human reason or logic; but in the midst of the catastrophic confusion, I felt I saw proof of God, of an Infinite Power of Love. It was God who respected human freedom enough to allow us to destroy part of God's creation, and who also cares enough about us in our sin to suffer with us. God was there in Hiroshima. God was participating in that agony with us. I have been touched by the power of the Transcendent who does indeed care for us. And that Power also requires us to love and forgive one another."

Since going through the extreme limit of the space between life and death, she feels a serenity and peace in her daimon (center of being), a sense of confidence and security in God. She feels it is a special privilege to be a Christian peacemaker, though there is a cross to carry and pain to bear, because she has a God who can respond to her suffering.

<sup>27</sup>Ezekiel 36:29.

<sup>28</sup>Ezekiel 36:35.

<sup>29</sup>Eichrodt, 503-504.

<sup>30</sup>Ezekiel 36:33.

<sup>31</sup>Ezekiel 36:34-35.

<sup>32</sup>Ezekiel 36:36.

<sup>33</sup>Ezekiel 36:37-38.

<sup>34</sup>Zimmerli. Man and His Hope, 120.

<sup>35</sup>Priestley, 27.

<sup>36</sup>Jurgen Moltmann, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>37</sup>Matthew 27:46b.

<sup>38</sup>Priestley, 60.

<sup>39</sup>eg. see Luke 11:37-54.

<sup>40</sup>Robert Jay Lifton. The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 369.

<sup>41</sup>Priestley, 40.

<sup>42</sup>Ewert H. Cousins. Hope and the Future of Man (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) 91.

<sup>43</sup>From The Songs of Hiroshima (Printed privately). Translated by Wayne Lammers.

<sup>44</sup>Miyao Ohara, ed. The Songs of Hiroshima (Hiroshima: Shunyo-sha Shuppan, 1964) 16-17. This is my revision of the original translation by Miyao Ohara. The reference cited has the poem in both languages.

<sup>45</sup>cf. John 1:5.

<sup>46</sup>I John 3:14.



## CHAPTER 6

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Hiroshima is indeed not just a past event, but an ongoing reality. The world remained ignorant of (or was kept ignorant of) that simple but crucial fact for many years after the war. We have often been told that the A-bomb brought a speedy end to the war and minimized casualties; but what it actually brought to survivors is endless struggle—struggle to overcome the unhealed wounds that affect the total person—physical, social, psychological and spiritual. The hibakusha must live personally with all the traumas to their bodies and psyches, but we are all connected to their experience and we are all hibakusha in a larger sense. We all survived the first nuclear war in Japan, and we are all linked as potential victims of the next nuclear war. These facts alone would justify our identification with their pain. But I have also tried to show that our empathy with their pain can actually produce a deeper faith, a deeper commitment to life, and a deeper commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament and peace.

Hiroshima is a human drama, a living human experience which has not yet been completed. The A-bomb

degenerated the quality of life for many thousands of hibakusha. Even now, over four decades after the bombing, the dreadful scars remain on the bodies and in the hearts of the hibakusha. In fact, the painful struggles of the hibakusha become deeper and more intense with the passing of the months and years. There is no certainty about what may develop since the radiation aftereffects continue to permeate society. A great number of the surviving hibakusha are suffering under the persistent shadow of death. Moreover, the imprint of "death in life" is transmitted even to my generation, the so-called "second generation hibakusha."

The bomb seemed to destroy everything in the city. And yet, it could not wipe out all hope for peace and resistance to war in the hibakusha. The more painful their hardships are felt, the more intensely they strive against any situation in which manufacturing and use of nuclear weapons are justified.

I witnessed such heroic struggles deeply engraved under the scars and deformed figures of hibakusha. I heard them silently asking me, "How much effort have you made today so that the world may live in peace?" Like the oleander, resurrected from the radioactive wasteland, the hibakusha inspire and challenge us to create a new vision for the future.

Hiroshima is the living experience of hibakusha

who commit themselves to a world with no more nuclear victims. Out of their own experience, the hibakusha have persistently appealed for the eradication of all nuclear weapons. They carry an almost intolerable spiritual burden as the danger of nuclear war mounts daily; for they feel that their suffering will have meaning only if nuclear war is averted. So to explore Hiroshima means also to explore a new perspective on nuclear weapons in order to turn the current world thinking away from their proliferation and toward their abolition.

The experience of Hiroshima is the opening chapter to the possible annihilation of humankind. It raises the crucial question of the durability of human existence. If we take Hiroshima seriously, we cannot help but choose to preserve life on earth by working to abolish all nuclear weapons. With the equivalent now of over one million Hiroshima bombs in the arsenals of the superpowers, the first bombing may represent our last chance to learn from history. We cannot afford to remain ignorant of the reality and tremendous dimensions of the Hiroshima experience.

"Rest in peace, for the mistake shall not be repeated." These words are carved in Japanese on the stone at the memorial cenotaph in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. They are the passionate prayer and cry that abide deep in the hearts of the hibakusha. Whether the promise not to repeat the mistake can be made a lasting

reality depends crucially on the processes of changing modes of thinking, transforming lives, and then becoming creatively involved in the political arena. The church cannot relegate the story of Hiroshima to past history. On one level the church must allow the story to inform our assessment of what nuclear war would be like today. But on a deeper level, the sufferings of the hibakusha need to touch the church in such a way that its spiritual paralysis is overcome by the power of life. Denial of suffering, denial of the nuclear threat, and fear in all its guises can be counteracted by the journey into the cross and resurrection impregnant in Hiroshima. By confronting evil and moving through it to the hope of God's future, the church can experience a "heart of stone" transformed into a "heart of flesh" and celebrate a hope never imagined in its apathy.

**APPENDIX**

Out of twenty interviews made in the fall of 1983, two cases are introduced here. It is often said that every hibakusha's case is unique and no two are alike.

Indeed, the bombing experiences are so diverse that these two may not represent "typical" hibakusha stories.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that they will be of help in exploring the meaning of the atomic destruction as their stories and interpretations unfold.

Reports based on surveys by questionnaire cannot adequately assess the gravity of the human dimension of the bombing, since they depend on generalities and statistics. Individual case studies, therefore, seem to be more appropriate for revealing the depth of suffering.

Here are the reasons for selecting these two cases:

1. There are common characteristics in both cases: (a) the rest of the family members of both subjects were killed and the subjects alone survived; (b) both subjects are mothers who lost all their children; (c) both are suffering from the aftereffects of radiation and are living with constant anguish regarding their own health.
2. Despite the commonalities, there is a clear and noteworthy difference between them with regard to their interpretation of their experiences; ie. one lost all meaning in life while the other acquired a new meaning.

It seems a worthwhile task to ascertain what caused such diverse responses in order to understand better the meaning of the A-bomb destruction.

#### CASE STUDY I (Kiku)

At the time of the bombing, Kiku (name changed), a 39-year-old woman, was a wife and the mother of a two-year-old son. She was happily married and was looking forward to the growth of their only child.

She was with her family inside their house, 1.2 kilometers (3/4 mile) from the hypocenter. Startled by the flash, she tried to run to her son. In an instant following the flash, however, the house was leveled by the blast. Kiku was trapped inside the house, covered by debris and unconscious. Her husband had been apparently blown to a neighboring house and buried under the bricks. She returned to consciousness when her head was stepped on by fleeing people. Responding to her cry for help, a neighbor girl came to rescue her. Surrounded by the blazing fire, she barely managed to escape the inferno.

On the way, she forcefully wrested a futon (thick blanket) from an elderly woman to shield herself from the heat. Leaving the woman there crying for help, she and the neighbor girl ran frantically to flee from the fire, thinking only of their own safety.

Around August 14, Kiku went back to her parents' house, though she still cannot remember who brought her there. She has had no information about her husband and son since the bombing.

She had to stay in bed many weeks due to the acute symptoms of radiation sickness. In contrast to her excellent health before the bombing, she now suffered from a number of physical problems such as severe dizziness, extremely low blood pressure, pyorrhea alveolaris (an infection of the gums and tooth sockets characterized by the formation of pus), and consequently the loss of all her teeth.

In April, 1948, Kiku remarried to her mother's relative who was twenty years older than she. He was a kind and loving man who took care of Kiku very well. She had to endure grief again, however, over his death from stomach cancer in 1963. There were no children between them. She was again left alone.

Widowed the second time, she started working on the cleaning staff of the city. Her life was not easy, and she barely survived financially. She continued her work for 10 or 11 years, though during this time she was hospitalized with emphysema for half a year. Unable to recuperate completely, she suffered from dizziness and often collapsed. She was repeatedly hospitalized.

In 1975, at the age of 70, she complained about eye



pain and had an operation. Consequently she lost her sight completely and had to quit her work. Since then she has been living in a nursing home.

Following are some of the meaningful statements she made during my interview. These quotations capture something of the quality of her life since August 6, 1945.

Watching others recovering, I was thinking all the time that everyone should have been killed.

I cannot remember all the details about what I did that day.

I don't have any idea about my husband—whether he was killed or... I haven't seen him since then.

I couldn't find any remnant of the bodies or bones of either my husband or my son.

Everything was burned down so completely that I couldn't tell even where we used to live.

I feel very sorry for that elderly woman...stealing her futon (blanket). Why didn't I give her a hand?

Since the bombing, my life has consisted of trials and tribulations. I cannot find adequate words to describe the hardships of my life.

So many aches and pains were all over my body that I didn't know what to do with them.

I suspect that my emphysema has something to do with the A-bomb.

A-bomb sickness attacks me unexpectedly.

If only I could enjoy health, I would be able to work and save some money and wouldn't have to worry about my health so much.

I wouldn't mind a small wage or hardship in work as long as I would have a healthy body to work with.

Well, I am left all alone, like it or not... I lost my home and everything. I just want to forget everything. I get to feeling so miserable, I think

maybe I'd be better off dead.

If I were more healthy, I would be glad that I live. But ceaselessly afflicted by illness and suffering from pains and aches here and there, I can hardly feel my life is worth living. Besides, because of my blindness, I cannot help but depend on others for essentials. What a pity! I don't have any hope for the future. I am inclined to think that I should go anytime. I wish I could go soon!

Feeling dizzy, I cannot do anything but wonder what I should take to kill myself. I've been tempted to build a fire to burn everything including myself. My thoughts often go in that direction.

My feeling was...if I were to die, it would be alright—not a feeling based on understanding but just not caring.

If I had been killed then, I wouldn't have to mourn over my life.

I wish I could forget them! But those painful memories stick in my mind so clearly that I cannot do anything about them.

As I close my eyes, my son appears before me and I often burst into tears. Sincerely I wish my son had been spared. He would be 39 or 40 years old by now if he were alive. Why did I survive while my husband and son both died? I feel sorry that my son died so young, even without knowing what the world is like.

I did an awful thing to that elderly woman. Not a day has passed without remembering what I did to her. I should have given her a hand. My present misery must be the divine judgment.

If I could see again, I would like to make a pilgrimage to Shikoku. Whatever god it may be, I would like to worship.

May the bomb fall on everyone, then they will understand my misery. Above all, Americans should know the bitter taste of it.

I hate war. I really hate it. I feel like the entire nation should share my fate.

The emperor should be blamed; but it is, indeed, hard to take responsibility for it (the A-bomb destruction).

We didn't ask to start the war. Is it too much for a surviving widow to ask for financial assistance that she may be able to support herself?

Interpretation of Case I (Kiku)

"The rest of my family died. I was left alone." these words describe the central reality in the life of Kiku. The atomic bomb deprived her of all purpose in life, suddenly robbing her of husband and son who were her reason to live. As long as she cannot put this reality into a broader system of thought, or find meaning in the death of her family, she will not be able to overcome the painful memories of the premature death of her loved ones.

Kiku tries to convince herself of the relation between her immoral behavior toward the elderly woman and her present misery. She lives with constant guilt for having stolen the futon to save herself. In other words, to her mind, her present state is at least partly a result of that wrongful deed.

This attitude of hers does not solve her inner struggles. Because of interpreting her suffering as punishment for her own deed, she limits her thought and imagination to herself alone. As a result, she is not able to appropriate the most fundamental fact, ie. that the war and the A-bomb were the cause of the death of her family as well as her current misery.

Caught by the specter of the past, she does not wrest meaning from, nor attempt evaluation of, the A-bomb experience and the afflictions she suffered. Without some such meaning and perspective, she cannot muster up the necessary inner strength and resolution to cope with the difficulties her sufferings impose on her daily life.

What causes Kiku to remain in such a limited interpretation of her experience? First, there is such a significantly large blank in her memory of the bombing that she cannot see how the death of her family and her own behavior are related to the greater evil of the bomb. Therefore she has no basis for restoring her moral sense. Consequently she cannot see any possibility to explore a new way of conducting her life in its relationship to her deceased family.

Second, Kiku's loss of meaning in life seems also to prevent her from pursuing an understanding of the meaning of death; for the healthy acceptance of the new kind of relationship with the deceased is possible only on the basis of one's strong urge to live. But this accommodation with the meaning of death is impossible in the case of Kiku who does not make any effort to find a meaning or purpose in life.

As a result of these factors, she is tormented by endless self-condemnation since she does not confront the ultimate cause nor try to prevent its repetition. Thus,

lacking restoration of her spiritual vitality, she has come to long for death as the end of her mental torture.

#### CASE STUDY II (Sumie)

On August 6, 1945, Sumie (name changed) was 29 years old, the mother of 4 and 2-year-old daughters and in the sixth month of pregnancy. Her husband was a factory worker. Because of the food shortage and B59 air raids during the war, Sumie's primary concern then was about the safety and wellbeing of her children.

When the bomb was dropped, she and her family were eating breakfast at home, .97 kilometers (.6 mile) from the hypocenter. With the piercing flash and deafening sound, all four were trapped under the rubble of the house. After a while, Sumie and her husband managed to pull themselves from the demolished building. They made desperate attempts to rescue their daughters who were crying for help. They scratched at the clay walls with their fingernails. But their efforts were in vain. When they finally succeeded in opening a hole, flames had enveloped the scene. Choked and almost suffocated by the smoke and frightened by the flames, they were forced to desert their daughters. Sumie and her husband ran stumbling and falling to the street, begging for forgiveness from their daughters.

Furthermore, while Sumie was trying to remove

herself from the debris, she heard a neighbor woman calling for help. But she had no choice but to abandon her too, due to the blazing fire. She remembers feeling as if her feet had caught on fire.

Sumie barely made it to the river bank with her husband, tormented by the resonance of the cry of her children. She repeatedly tried to return to help them; but the whole area was totally engulfed in flames by then. She sat on the river bank like a ghost, thinking of nothing but her daughters.

After a one-month stay at a first-aid station, Sumie and her husband returned to the suburb of Hiroshima where her husband had come from. She was hoping to start life all over again with him since she was still only 29 years old. However, in September of 1945, both had to be hospitalized because of acute symptoms of radiation sickness. One day her husband died suddenly from an unstoppable hemorrhage from a blood vein after an intravenous shot. Apparently he had been suffering from a lack of blood platelets essential for clotting; and any wound, even an injection, had the potential to be fatal.

During this hospital stay, the experience of the bombing frequently came back to her consciousness. Sumie agonized over the memories of her lost family, suffering from insomnia and a series of nightmares. Nevertheless, she gave birth to her son in December of 1945.

She continued in the hospital one year from her admission in September of 1945. Soon after her release, she lost the sight of her right eye. In spite of that, she remarried late in 1947 and had a daughter by her second husband. She tried to reconstruct her life; but she had to continue to suffer illnesses such as chronic diarrhea, severe dizziness, and constipation. She returned to the hospital a number of times. Eventually her family exhausted all the money they had.

In the spring of 1961, an almost unbearable headache afflicted her and severe nausea followed. These symptoms, along with an abnormally high rate of heartbeat, caused her to be admitted to the government hospital again. After thorough examination, she was found to be far below average in red and white blood cell and platelet count. Luckily, the Medical Care Law was enacted and she was finally declared a certified A-bomb patient. To her relief, all medical costs for her treatment were paid by the government.

At the age of 47 or 48 she required another hospitalization because of very severe symptoms of menopause. Since then she has had to visit the hospital three or four times a month. Indeed, this has been her story since the bomb. She has seldom felt well due to the radiation aftereffects. Not a day has passed without some problem such as dizziness, severe headaches, susceptibility to fatigue, amnesia, or difficulty with mental work and/or

emotional instability.

In 1967, Sumie changed to another hospital where she befriended other hibakusha and began attending monthly anti-war and anti-nuclear meetings. Gradually she began to give testimony of her bombing experience to non-hibakusha.

In 1972 or 73, due to the lack of psychological equilibrium caused by anguish over her daughter's poor health as well as her own, she entered a mental hospital. Her anger against the government for starting the futile war which led to the A-bomb, aggravated her psychological condition. She suffered from neuroses, but her condition was helped by the busy activities surrounding the marriage and childbearing of her daughter. Since at least to her family, Sumie was a significant person, she did not have to struggle so hard for self worth.

Currently Sumie is living with her second husband, their daughter and son-in-law, and two grandchildren. She has been receiving from the government a monthly special allowance and medical assistance of 40,000 yen (app. \$167.00); but she would not be able to support herself without the financial help of her son-in-law.

Following are some of the meaningful statements she made during my interview. These quotations capture something of the quality of her life since August 6, 1945.

I ran desperately, deserting my children. I was frightened by the blazing fire. I felt my feet would have caught fire if I hadn't run away. I could not help but give up my children.



I was thinking about nothing but my daughters at the river bank. I was like a ghost, feeling numb. I couldn't cry—didn't have any strength even to feel sad.

My husband didn't have any luck. The IV was given to him first and he died due to hemorrhaging. But thanks to his death, because the shot was not given to me, I could survive.

I wake up in the middle of the night with an alarming dream that my daughters are crying in the midst of burning fire, "Mother, Mother!" or that my husband appeared in front of me in the very clothes he was wearing on that day when the bomb was dropped.

On a sleepless night, during day-dreaming, or whenever I was caught by a reminder of those days, I was terribly disheartened by the memories of my husband and my children who were burned alive.

Especially when I become anxious about my health and suspect the possibility of impending death, the circumstances of that day come clearly back to my mind, and the first thing I have to do after my death is to apologize to my husband, children, and the neighbor lady.

Everytime I think about the war—why we had to fight such a futile war—I am terribly disturbed. I even feel a grudge against the war and those who compelled us to the war; for, without the war, my children would not have been burned alive.

Being bombed at the age of 28 or 29—the peak of life and the most energetic period of life—I could not enjoy my health, constantly suffering from illness.

The A-bomb indeed made my life meaningless and of no good.

After the bombing, not a day has passed without suffering ill health. I completely lost my health. I have been in and out of the hospital so often that I do not even remember how many hospitalizations I have repeated by now.

I was frightened when I was told by the staff that radiation has been causing my physical problems and that once I was exposed to radiation, it was absorbed in my bones and will never be disposed of. It is depressing to know my illness is incurable. I am contaminated by

radiation.

I sometimes feel as if I were endlessly falling down to the bottom of the earth. I guess this must be a radiation aftereffect.

If only I hadn't been exposed to radiation, I wouldn't have to suffer so much.

The A-bomb did irreplaceable damage to my body. Whatever physical problems I have, I am inclined to suspect its relationship to the bomb. My life is indeed filled with anxiety over the radiation sickness.

Quite often I suddenly become lonely, starting to worry that my life will be over soon.

Not a few times, I have become very anxious about my life. How often I worry whether I will be able to cope with the illness this time.

At a regular check-up, a doctor at the government hospital told me that I should not come so often since the A-bomb sickness could not be treated expediently. He said that one visit every three months was enough. So I said to him, "In order to receive the medical assistance and monthly allowance from the government, I have to be under a doctor's care, so I must come three times a month. My physical condition doesn't allow me to come for treatment though." Then the doctor said to me, "Do you come to the hospital for the sake of money?"

It was not my choice to fall into this kind of illness. The government should take responsibility for this.

Why do I alone have to suffer and go through all these tribulations? I cannot think anything but the government--the government should be blamed; for it started the war and got us involved in it. The government forced us to fight and made us suffer so much.

Both those who died in the war and from the A-bomb did not kill themselves. They were the victims of war.

If I died, then who would there be to look after my family's dead? My two daughters are dead. So is my husband. If I'm not around to pay respect to them there's no one to look after them. That thought makes me feel like I just can't die.

Although I seldom feel that I am glad to have survived,

if I am here, my daughter and grandchildren can count on me. So, I have to live.

I want to live at least until my grandchildren grow up, though my life is an endless battle with illnesses.

In order to console the souls of my deceased family, I have to make all possible efforts to prevent war. For this reason, I have to live.

When the tragedy of Hiroshima is forgotten, another war will break out. We must constantly remind the world that so many people suffered. I cannot bear to see war in my grandchildren's days.

I'd like to build the world in which there is no war!

#### INTERPRETATION OF CASE II (Sumie)

In contrast to Kiku, Sumie did manage not to lose her purpose in life and her will to live despite her anguish over her radiation sickness and her sense of guilt over her deceased family. The reason seems to be that she was able to put her A-bomb experience into perspective and look at it in a way that actually focuses her sense of purpose in life.

Sumie could not reveal the fact that she had abandoned her children in the fire until 1977 when a survey of the livelihood of hibakusha took place. This shows that her experience of the bombing and the sense of guilt over the deserted children had been a heavy, unresolved burden for her. She had long tried to convince herself that it would have been a fatal gesture to try to rescue anyone from the sea of fire; so fleeing from it was the only rational choice. And yet, whenever Sumie suffered from

severe sickness or became anxious about facing the end of her own life, she could not help but remember her painful past. No justification of her behavior was satisfactory. In other words, she could not accept the death of her children without feeling her guilt. These are the reasons she seldom revealed any details of her children's deaths until 1977. For over 30 years, she was not released from her deeply internalized guilt.

It is certainly understandable how unbearably painful it is for any mother whose only hope and joy was her children, to confront the unacceptable reality that she deserted them at their time of greatest need. Yet , through the interaction with other hibakusha she met at the hospital and with the encouragement and support of the staff, she gradually became able to deal with the deaths of her daughters. By openly admitting her sense of guilt, she could allow herself to assume responsibility for her behavior. Consequently, she came to an awareness of the root cause of her misery and she was able to objectify her relationship to her deceased family. She describes it as follows:

When the bomb was dropped, everyone was so panic-stricken that she or he lost sanity. Even parents deserted their children, concerned about only their own lives. Everyone was thinking nothing but to flee from the blazing fire. Filled with fear, I just ran relentlessly toward the river bank. Without the same experience I underwent, you might think how cruel a mother I was to abandon my children. Of course, no mother would allow her children to be killed in front of her own eyes. If you were under the same circumstances

as mine, however, I think you might do the same. otherwise you would die in the fire.

It was the A-bomb that made me act so cruelly. Without the bomb, I hadn't had to experience such a fatal situation. Since my daughters are dead, there is no way for me to offer an apology. All that I can do is pray for the consolation of their souls; but I think that the real consolation means to abolish all wars. For this end, I should live. As long as I can move around, I'd like to work to ban all war.

She realizes now that it was the A-bomb which destroyed all the structures, resources, and organizations which had sustained life around her. Under such ultimate, desperate circumstances, people lost all sensibleness and sanity and succumbed to the instinct for self-preservation. It was the bomb that did not allow her to remain human by depriving her of all possibility of moral conduct. It was the bomb that destroyed even the most basic human relationship—the one linking mother and child. Thus it is the A-bomb which should be opposed.

In order to circumvent her sense of guilt, Sumie had to move beyond mere anti-A-bomb thought. The hospital where she stayed provided opportunities to raise consciousness and work against war and nuclear weapons in addition to providing moral support. Sumie actually began to participate in concrete actions which could help to eradicate the root causes of war. Her effort to organize her life by activating her anti-A-bomb thought made it possible for her to reconstruct her relationship with her deceased family, and eventually that became the way to overcome her guilt consciousness. For this successful

process, she also credits both the physical and moral support of her present family as a significant factor.

Sumie's involvement in the anti-war and anti-A-bomb movement makes it possible to give some meaning to her tormented history with the bombing and her chronic radiation sickness. Before that involvement, the A-bomb meant to her "the unforgettable great calamity" and "the disaster which made my life meaningless." The bomb burned her children alive, killed her husband, and now her daughter by her second marriage is destined to be less healthy than normal. She declares:

I feel when we forget about the misery and torment inflicted by the war, another war will break out. Thus hibakusha like me have a very important mission to let the world know about the immeasurable, endless agony and affliction of the hibakusha so that the world may work not to create another hibakusha in any part of the earth. My most sincere wish is to build a world without war by spreading the message from the hibakusha.

Thus her anguish-filled life has become the very basis for her anti-war and anti-A-bomb stand. She has, in fact, found functional meaning and affirmation in her experiences surrounding the bombing event. Her story can make a difference regarding future prospects of nuclear war.

We all have to be reminded constantly of the suffering history of the hibakusha. Even though there is no global war in our present era, it will be awful if nuclear war breaks out in my grandchildren's time.

When she says this, she illumines the historical depth of her understanding. She has found a reason for living in the lives of her daughter and grandchildren (symbols of the

larger human family). Despite her series of almost unendurable battles with sickness, she has been able to see herself as a link between the past represented by her deceased family and the future represented by her growing grandchildren. As she gives testimony about her bombing experience, with her earnest plea for no more hibakusha, she feels the surge of life-affirming energy within herself.

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE TWO CASES

The cases dealt with above obviously do not adequately represent all the aspects of the human destruction of the A-bomb. Significantly more cases should be thoroughly examined before final conclusions can be reached concerning the overall impact of the destruction on the hibakusha. Though extensive case studies wait for future endeavor, I will here focus on the cases of Kiku and Sumie to point out by comparison some features of the A-bomb's effects on human lives.

As mentioned earlier, both cases have the following two common characteristics: (1) family disintegration and (2) impairment of physical wellbeing. Case I (Kiku) reminds us of the overall thorough impact of the A-bomb destruction on human existence. The bomb not only destroyed the essential physical and social conditions for human survival, but it also robbed the hibakusha of the will to live

by depriving them of meaning and purpose in life.

Takeshi Ito has written that many victims feel isolated from other people and that their "negation mentality" stems from a pessimism about their own futures; thus they tend to be passive and withdrawn.<sup>1</sup> The loss or the serious depletion of physical strength and energy necessary for living aggravates their mental attitudes. Tadashi Ishida describes such victims as "drifters," because they cannot believe that the future holds any potential for them and thus they give themselves up to a life of spiritual desolation which negates any future possibility.<sup>2</sup> Ishida sympathetically pleads their case: "What hope is there for a body ruined by the atomic bomb? What purpose is there in such a life?"<sup>3</sup>

At a collective level, it should not be overlooked that there is a milieu which hinders hibakusha from trying to find the root causes of their agony and suffering. More specifically, as mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, Japanese society in general looked at the hibakusha's sufferings as if they were the fault of the hibakusha. Their non-sympathetic attitude cannot be separated from the U.S. atomic monopoly policy which attempted to conceal the nature of the A-bomb destruction. Moreover, the Japanese government covered up, underestimated, and even tried to erase the realities of atomic suffering.<sup>4</sup>



Without some helpful external conditions, including the support of other hibakusha, the staff of her hospital, and her relationship with her grandchildren, Sumie might also have failed to resist the spiritual isolation. However, the external conditions in the case of Sumie are merely contingent and personal. None of them is guaranteed to be sustainable. As a matter of fact, many hibakusha were denied the conditions accessible to Sumie. For instance, in the case of Kiku, despite her marriage after losing her entire family, she was again left alone after the death of her second husband. By depriving her not only of family, but also of home, all possessions, and ability to work, the bomb made it immeasurably difficult for her fully to reconstruct her life.

To make the situation worse, despite the national and collective cause of the bombing, assistance from the government is so extremely insufficient that many hibakusha remain impoverished. Even Sumie, who receives the maximum allowance, cannot support herself without financial help from her daughter's family. Furthermore, the longstanding ambivalent and non-committal official attitude of the government in taking responsibility for initiating the war (the cause of the bombing) has made it more difficult for victims to reconcile themselves to their relatives' deaths and to relieve the sense of guilt.

Nevertheless, there are also many hibakusha, such

as Sumie, who eventually made their passage from death and desolation to life and hope through encounter with others who survived and with those who are sympathetic to their existence. Often the crucial sustaining strength emerged from a strong human bond which the hibakusha could trust. Specifically in Sumie's case, her caring for her family, especially her daughter and grandchildren, prevented her from giving up her life in the midst of her excruciating physical and mental tribulations. Kenzaburo Oe has written about hibakusha like Sumie: "They are people who, despite all, didn't commit suicide."<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the staff of her hospital has provided Sumie with occasions in which she could experience what Lifton calls "the sense of life-energy and movement" and "connection to other human beings"<sup>6</sup> as she started getting acquainted with other living people who underwent similar experiences. It was this sense of solidarity with others that enabled Sumie to share gradually her pent-up feelings including guilt over the deceased, anxiety about her health, and indignaion against war.

Furthermore, it was this sense of solidarity which helped Sumie cope with her survival guilt (the idea that survival was somehow conspicuous and, indeed, unnatural in a world where death reigned). After years of denial and low morale, Sumie could come to believe that being consciously alive itself gives meaning to the world. It seems that to

recognize that others too had survived and to begin relating to them in a deep, trusting manner, cast a new ray of light to help Sumie out of the darkness that locked her in with her departed dead.

It is true that even after Sumie moved through human contact and solidarity to an affirmation of reality where life and hope for the future are the norms, her initial shock of the bombing remains so powerful and her present existence so powerful that the ghost of death and desolation returns again and again to haunt her. Thus her physical and spiritual struggles still ceaselessly continue today. However, they are the very struggles on which Sumie has formulated her bombing experience into an anti-war perspective. Though her thought is not fully developed yet, this definite position of hers against war, the primary cause of her misery, has become an indispensable element to prevent spiritual desolation. Thus her anguish-filled bombing experience has been turned into a life-affirming basis for declaring the need to abolish the A-bomb and all war.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"The A-bomb Victims' Situation and their Negation Mentality" Shinsho (Thought) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, April, 1960) 422.

<sup>2</sup>Hangenbaku: Nagasaki Hibakusha No Seikatsushi (Against the Atomic Bomb: Life Histories of Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Survivors) (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1973) 23.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Takeshi Ito, Hibakusha (Tokyo: Yoyogi, 1978) 5.

<sup>5</sup>Hiroshima Notes (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965) 76.

<sup>6</sup>Death in Life (New York: Random House, 1967) 90.

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